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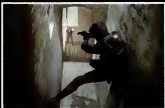


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FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	081
SILENT STORM	083
LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT	083
TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM	084
BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II	084
FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL	084
RISE TO HONOR	085
SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE	085
FREESTYLE STREET SOCCER	085
WINNING ELEVEN 7	086
CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH	086
NFL STREET	087
AIRFORCE DELTA STRIKE	088
R-TYPE FINAL	089
COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	090
CREATIVE GIGAWATKS 5750	091
METROID: ZERO MISSION	092
THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	093
YU YU KAHUSHO: SPIRIT DETECTIVE	093
KING OF FIGHTERS EX2: HOWLING BLOOD	093

MORE

TIPS, CODES, ARCHIVES

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	95
→ Crystalize your gameplan	
TOP 10 TIPS: A1	98
→ You want to win, don't you?	
CONNECT	100
→ Is Ultima Online entering its renaissance?	
RETRO/ACTIVE	102
→ Resident Evil. That's all we're saying.	
THE LIST	104
→ Nest, clean charts, easy on the eyes	

REGULARS

THE GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

PEOPLE

→ Tom Byron is your father

POST

→ Wait for it: more readers complaining about our reviews.

GAMEPORT: ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES

→ Arrive two hours early and please remove your shoes

CHARTS

→ This is you telling us what you like

GAME GEEZER

→ Stupid game makers need to learn how to save

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES



Our mission at "FMCA" would capture the hearts of millions.

IT IS POINTLESS TO RESIST, MY SON

→ Today will be a day long remembered: I'm the new editor-in-chief and my name is Tom Byron. I'm awestruck to be taking this command—GMR is such a mighty force in the galaxy. And I'm convinced it's my destiny to be here. A quick review of the evidence shows why:

- This month's cover story is based on new Star Wars games from LucasArts. I worked at LucasArts! Wo-hy!
- I was once the editor of Start magazine for Atari users. Start begins with the word "start"! Uh, don't you see?
- I took over GMR from a British dude named Simon. I once worked for a British dude named Simon! (Er, isn't every British dude named Simon?)
- I'm not a dark-side-of-the-Force madman, but Darth Vader and I do share the goal of turning something that's already great into something even greater: the Death Star, me GMR!

The circle is now complete. Your destiny lies with me, young GMR. Simon knew this to be true. I've long admired this team—and the work they've done to make GMR the best game magazine around. It's exciting to think where we can take this. Together we will rule the galaxy!

Darth Byron, Editor-in-Chief

HE FINDS YOUR LACK OF FAITH DISTURBING JAMES MILKIE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The Face of Evil Has Many Names: The Milkman doesn't fear the dark side. He is the dark side. When not impaling freelancers—or editors from neighboring magazines—on shards of withering sarcasm, our second-in-command can usually be found leveling up his Red Mage in Final Fantasy XI. While it took a considerable while for him to acquire his subtop and chocobo license, Milky still found time to write up this month's cover feature on Republic Commando.

ADVENTURE: HEH! EXCITEMENT! HEH! AN EDITOR CARRIES OUT THESE THINGS CARRIE SHEPHERD MANAGING EDITOR

The Straight and the Narrow: With David Chen feathering his hair over at Xbox Nation, it's up to newly mutilated managing editor, Carrie Shepherd, to make sure the staff gets their writing done, meets their deadlines, and caps lunch breaks off at three hours. While Carrie would probably describe her technique as "firm but friendly," others on the masthead might suggest "menacing authority" as being slightly more accurate. We kid, Carrie. You know we do.

HE MAY NOT LOOK LIKE MUCH, BUT HE'S GOT IT WHERE IT COUNTS: KID TOM PRICE NEWS EDITOR

Wrestling With Incontinence: The past couple of months have been hard on the Peepster. Counter-Strike on Xbox proved to be a major letdown, and this month's Condition Zero is a disappointment in the way only a game four years in development can be. What's a counterterronist with no game literally to do? Play Star Wars: Battlefront, apparently, and that's precisely what the Peep did this month. Check our Star Wars feature for all the Peep's details.

I'M ANDREW PISTONWALKER. I'M HERE TO RESCUE YOU ANDREW PISTON WRITER

A Hero for the Ages: Every crew has a young'un, and in the case of GMR, that young'un is the Fiat. The burden of being the "new hope" of an editorial staff carries many responsibilities, not the least of which is the "mandatory mobbing" rule, a practice known to have Robert Downey II many a promising career. Having been reared in Milwaukee, though, has given young Andrew an inner power no one was expecting. Some call it the Force, others call it a "hollow leg."

DON'T EVERYBODY THINK GARY AT ONCE GARY "BOSSHOSS" SEARROD ART DIRECTOR

Can't Fight This Feeling: Don't let all the good-natured ribbing fool you—we really love Gary. Just sometimes less than others. The reason? Try as he might to resist it, there are times when our grumpy art director is simply slave to his own desire to break out the suction cups and just stick to a damn wall—which is why we gave him his own workspace, a bottle of Windex, some live bait, and plenty of "alone time." It's a wonder he gets any work done.

LAUGH IT UP, FUZZBLES CAROLINE KING DESIGNER

Let Your Love Light Shine: Our resident éclair diva seized GMR's interoffice relocation as an opportunity to call dibs on the primo cubicle space, knocking both Peep and the Fiat out of the running. Now a nearly impenetrable fortress of fascist feminine fury, Caroline's cube is outfitted with rearview mirrors (to better spot envious onlookers on the move), quick-action trap doors, and turret-mounted PsychoLasers™ set to "gEXXOR." She is comely now.

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Carrie Shepherd Managing Editor
Tom Price News Editor
Andrew Pfister Writer
Gerry Serrano Art Director
Caroline King Designer

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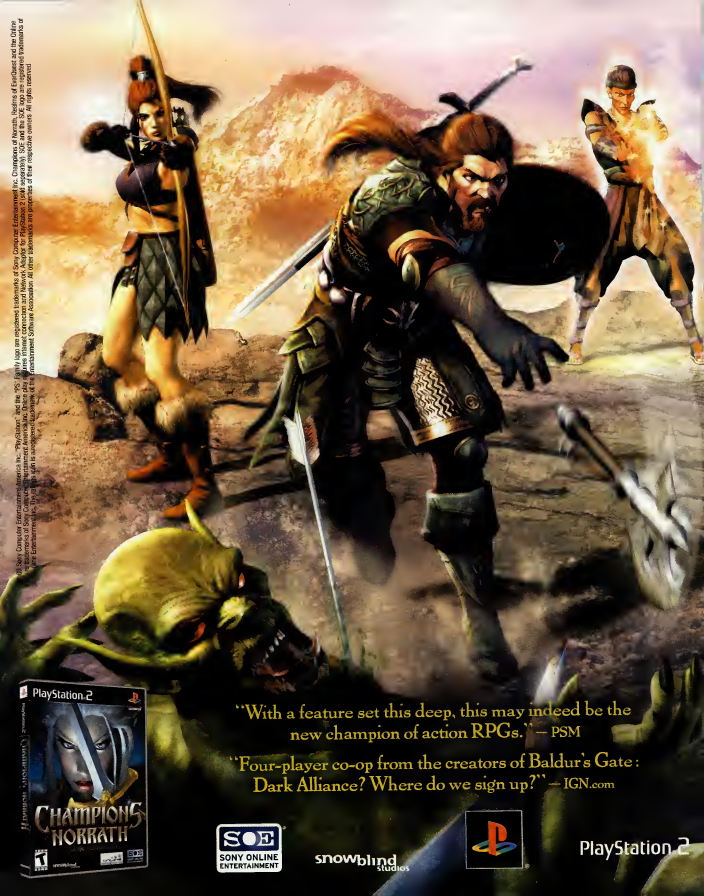
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"Four-player co-op from the creators of Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance? Where do we sign up?" — IGN.com



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Game Experience may change during online play

POST

READERS SOUND OFF ON THE SEX THING. GIRLS. WE JUST CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU

HE SAYS. SHE SAYS

I wholly agree with Kiera's letter in Issue #13 and wanted to express some of my own thoughts on the issue. Firstly, I don't understand why, if they are trying nowadays to make characters look realistic, they make their female characters too well endowed to be believable. It seems that every other aspect of a game could be realistic except for the female's breast size. Secondly, it truly angers and annoys me that we have all these games with women who have actual jiggling breasts, and I have to say, I've NEVER heard of a game with men's balls jiggling when they move around. It's not that I'm a pig and want to see some bouncy crotches, but I don't see any kind of balance here. I think if there are games out there that have scantily clad, jiggling, enormous-breasted women, there should be at least a few games with scantily clad, jiggly crotched men. As I said before, some sort of balance. Unfortunately, it seems that the world must think that no girl would ever play a videogame. And this magazine is no exception—you write all your articles as if they are read ONLY by men. Shame, everyone's missing out on a growing market of female game



→ Konami's *WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Heat*: the next front in the videogame gender war

consumers. Maybe someday you'll all come around.

—Sara Ignat

This letter is in response to Kiera Feminist Fighter X-2's letter, titled "Sex! Now That We Got Your Attention," which is about big-breasted female characters in videogames. If Kiera thinks all the big-breasted characters running around are utterly horrible, hasn't she noticed the television and advertisements in the REAL WORLD as of late? OK, implants

are just about everywhere you look now in the media. Recording artists, actresses, models, etc. Hell, even female wrestlers WHO FIGHT have implants. So, what is so wrong about having the females in videogames be busty?

In all reality, if you haven't noticed, Kiera, videogames are very much a fantasy world. OK, so the women have the breasts and the great figures, but the male characters tend to always ooze masculinity with rippling muscles. Even outside the game world. Look at comic books, dear. Ever notice the

bulge in those ultracomfortable X-Men costumes? I just don't see why every guy has to be John Holmes down there, ya know?

In my opinion, if you want male and female characters to be equals in the world of videogames, you already have it. Big-breasted, nice-figured women and hulking-up, ultra-athletic males...neither of which probably resembles most of the gaming market. I just don't see a Roseanne-esque character kicking butt in *Soul Calibur II*. Courtney Love, maybe....

—Patrick Wagner

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GOOD TIMES GONE?

First and foremost, I'd just like to send congratulations on making a magazine that I can actually enjoy. What I'm writing about is the fact that I am becoming increasingly concerned with the number of times I sit back and play a videogame and think to myself, "This just isn't fun." It seems that today, game designers are trying to do unique things, and one of the



MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

Want to talk to live girls who want to party with you? Then head on over to [1UP.com](#), click on the link that says "Boards," scroll down a bit to the GMR section, click on that, wait a couple of seconds for it to load...and then join the party! Simple! This month, we bring you board

moderator [RonDeBogert's](#) random generated observations on life. Enjoy!

Mielke's Euro Market in East Troy, WI, is of no relation to James Mielke of EGM and GMR fame. Publicly, the local news agencies are reporting otherwise.

The Craziest People in the World award has

once again been given to ice fishers. Why? Because after two weeks of near 50-degree weather, they're still out there, here in Wisconsin and elsewhere, at 5:00 a.m. Just to catch carp.

Mispelled homonyms really distract and confuse readers on message boards.

When your dad pays for your truck to be fixed because you're broke, and he doesn't expect you to pay him back if you can't, you realize just how much he loves you. "Thanks, Dad."

Toll House Cookie Candy Bar is the new kid on the block, and he's making waves. Look out!

The most provocative words in the entire

WRITE US: GM@ZIFFDAVIS.COM

most common attributes they add is a stunning sense of realism. I'm not saying this is a bad thing, but when I can't get at a comfort zone where the controls are intuitive and I'm not frustrated out of my mind, it starts to seem like a waste of time.

For example, games like *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid* have received excellent reviews, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a better stealth-action title. I realize these can be rewarding to play, but have they ever caused the sheer exhilaration of playing *Soul Calibur* with a waste of time.

Some of my favorite titles, those I have had fun with in the past few years, are along the lines of *SODOM* II online, the *Dynasty Warrior* series, *Amplitude*, and *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. You may disagree with some of these as being exhilarating, but if you look at the core of most of them, you'll find that the gameplay is very simple, maybe repetitive on the surface, but very addictive. And if you don't think *Tactics* is addictive, I can tell you right now, I've played *SODOM* in two weeks and I'm still not bored. Thanks for letting me share my thoughts.

_Ragnarok7038

Soul Calibur is indeed a thrilling experience, but we can easily find the same excitement in escaping from guards in *Metal Gear*. It's just a matter of personal preference. We do agree with your point about developers focusing on realism—sometimes, real life isn't so fun.

BEYOND EXCUSE

I work at EB Games, and during the Christmas holiday, I saw what was selling and what wasn't. So, it came as no surprise to me when I read in issue #13 that neither *Prince of Persia* nor *Beyond Good & Evil* made it on ANY top 10 list and not one system had either on their sales lists! This is ridiculous. Now I remember back in issue #10 where John Davison touched on this in his PlayStation Knowledge column. This kind of thing needs to be addressed. I know you can't make people buy what you want

them to, but both *Prince of Persia* and *Beyond Good & Evil* are brilliant games, games that are both beautiful and have astounding gameplay. These games didn't launch with a lot of hype, they didn't have big-budget ad campaigns, and they shouldn't need them. But it is painfully obvious that in today's videogame industry, unless you're double-fisting Mac 10s and slapping around prostitutes, you aren't going to appeal to the majority of "gamers." Now *Prince of Persia* is being bundled with a FREE copy of *Splinter Cell*, and *Beyond Good & Evil* is 20 bucks, just to move units. This is just sad because now these two games will be deemed as failures. True videogames around the world should wake up and recognize true art when they see it and not buy into overhyped trash (ahem, *True Crime*). Hopefully, you guys can comment on this travesty.

_GateKeeper1183

We'd love to comment, but we're still at a loss for words about the whole tragedy. Of course, Ubisoft shares some of the blame [for releasing *B&E* and *Prince of Persia* on the same damn day], but both games still aren't selling as well as they deserve to. Shame on everyone involved...except for us.

LOVE LINE

I have a major problem. I've been trying to get my girlfriend to play videogames with me, but she won't. The only game she plays is *Animal Crossing*, most racing games, and sometimes *Soul Calibur II* or *DDR*. I've gotten her to play *Halo* a few times, but she just got mad and quit. So, I need you guys to tell me how I can get her to play videogames that don't have you running around a little town helping [characters] out or arrows scrolling up a screen.

_Ryan

Sounds to us like she just doesn't enjoy playing games. You'd rather foot around in a Warthog than in your dad's Oldsmobile? Come on, don't be that guy. ☹



human lexicon: "queens" and "dikes." ¿Queeres diques?

QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

I was punching cute plant people in the face like it was second nature. - DG

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Capcom USA Inc.	www.capcom.com	112
Electronic Entertainment Expo	www.e3expo.com	63
Electronics Boutique/Elmwell	www.ebgames.com	8-9, 38-39, 49, 103
Full Sail Real World	www.fullsail.com	89
Gamely	www.gamely.com	47
Konami America	www.konami.com	28, 33, 35, 37, 57
Midway Games, Inc.	www.midway.com	31
Namco Homebrew	www.namco.com	23, 43, 53
Nintendo of America	www.nintendo.com	13, 55
Sony Computer Entertainment	www.scea.com	6-7
Sony Online Entertainment	www.sonyonline.com	14-15
Take 2 Interactive Software	www.take2games.com	29
Technic Inc.	www.technic.com	111
THQ Inc.	www.thq.com	4-5
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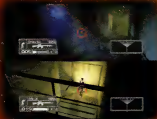
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FRONT



GMR NEWS NETWORK



I HEARD THE NEWS TODAY, OH BOY

HITMAN: CONTRACTS 021

The next installment in the series is coming. Watch your back

VAN HELSING 022

It's not just a vampire movie starring Hugh Jackman, it's a game too!

TALENT: TAKASHI IIZUKA 026

The director of *Sonic Heroes* yaks it up

FINAL FANTASY XIII 033

More characters revealed for Square Enix's upcoming blockbuster

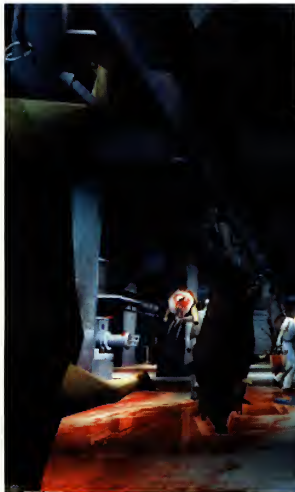
CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW 034

Our reporter returns from Vegas with his dignity intact (sort of)

INTERNATIONAL REPORT 035

Japanese gaming on \$20 a day. Plus, *Ghost in the Shell*





← Why are blood and gore always the things that pop out when games like this get a graphics upgrade? That's because games like this are all about the blood and gore (hence, levels like the slaughterhouse below). But the rest of the environments should really show off the upgrades, including the first level, which reportedly takes place in Paris. Ah, springtime in Paris—where have we heard that before?



HITMAN: CONTRACTS

THE RETURN OF UPC HEAD

U.S.A.

➔ He's bald, beautiful, deadly, and he's back. Agent 47, the antihero of Eidos' popular assassination simulation, returns to his efficient killing form in *Hitman: Contracts*. The latest game in the *Hitman* series should creep onto Xbox, PlayStation 2, and PC this spring, courtesy of developer Io Interactive.

Hitman: Contracts promises to be more of the stealthy killing fun of the previous games with some significant technological upgrades and a new and more darkly disturbing story line.

The previous game in the critically and commercially successful series—*Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*—was a huge improvement over the original *Hitman*: Agent 47, offering more branching paths and options for completing your dire tasks, as well as more clever ruses like disguises and "alternative" methods of execution. *Hitman: Contracts* will have even more neat stuff like that, including more ways to kill people with improvisational weaponry like pool cues and other blunt objects and even more options for beating a mission. There will also be more over-the-top settings like

the open-heart surgery scene from *Silent Assassin*.

Brushing up *Hitman*'s technology is also a major concern for the developers at Io, as they build on an already impressive graphics and sound engine that makes *Hitman* such a visceral experience to begin with. An all-new particle system, enhanced textures, and increased poly counts should all make for a much more believable *Hitman* world, as well as one that's darn pretty to die in.

That world will be a much darker and more disturbing one as well, as the story

line delves deeper into the conflicted psychology of an assassin. We'll get to know more about Agent 47 in this installment than we might want to.

The game will make a lot more concessions to the less hardcore gamers as well by lowering the learning curve (which made the prior games in the series a little hard to get into for some people) and streamlining the controls into a more intuitive scheme that should take less time to learn. *Hitman: Contracts* could reach even more gamers than before once it's released later this spring. **B+**

XB

PC

PS2

VAN
HELSINGDRIVING A WOODEN STAKE THROUGH
THE HEART OF GAMING

U.S.A.

Nowadays, a big-budget summer action blockbuster getting its own game doesn't come as a surprise—the surprise is when it doesn't. [The day Jerry Bruckheimer catches on is the day we are doomed.] So we'll forgive you for yawning at the news about *Van Helsing*, this year's Hugh Jackman vehicle, being turned into a slash-em-up by Vivendi Universal. No, the news to care about is the fact that the game doesn't look half bad.

The game follows the film's premise: *Van Helsing*, best known as the vampire-lore expert from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* novel, returns for more monster mashing. In the process, he's gone from an older man who handles the reference side of things to a younger, more capable action hero. His adversaries have changed a bit, too: *Dracula*'s still *Dracula*, but in this version of the story, *Van Helsing* has to take on other classic movie monsters, such as *Frankenstein's* monster and the

Wolfman.

If you're thinking this kind of setup is ideal for some *Castlevania*-style action game play, you're not alone: *VH* is basically taking the *Devil May Cry/Castlevania* LOL route when it comes to controlling *Van Helsing* through the Gothic manses and arid European steppes as he tracks his prey. The difference is that *Van*'s weaponry, which includes a hand-cranked machine gun, is much more impressive than *Leon Belmont's*.

If this sounds unoriginal so far, fear not, because there are plenty of little touches and details that make the game stand out. Our favorite example concerns *Van Helsing's* formidable hat—if it knocked around too much in combat, it can fall off...and then be picked up by one of his enemies, who'll put it on his own head to taunt *Van Helsing*. Finishing the game with your hat on, the developers promise, will yield a special surprise. At any rate, our hats are already off to them. **B-**

_Nich Maragos

More info at www.vivenduniversal.com

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→ Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
XB	FEB	BREAKDOWN Gives new meaning to "BFG."	🔥🔥
PC	FEB	FAR CRY Another slay, for you and me, in paradise.	🔥🔥
PS2/XB/GC	MAR	STARCRAFT: GHOST Will sell by the Wrathloads.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB/PC	MAR	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW Lays an awesome, multi-player experience.	🔥🔥🔥
GC	MAR	METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES (Only you could excitement and solid snakes)	🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB/PC	MAR	JAMES BOND: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING Backkicker or big-budget bomb?	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	MAR	RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK If you got your money, honey, we got your disease.	🔥🔥🔥
XB	MAR	DEAD OR ALIVE: ONLINE Can 3D fighting work over the Net? Let's hope so.	🔥🔥
XB	MAR	FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR So if that 17 guys can be	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	MAR	LIFELINE Does not respond to shouts of "Oh, crap!"	🔥🔥
PC	MAR	BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM We love the smell of silicon in the morning.	🔥🔥
GC	MAR	HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE Mad cows.	🔥
GC	MAR	POKÉMON COLLOSSEUM Scene of the death of hundreds of Pichachus.	🔥
PS2	MAR	SAMURAI WARRIORS It's like <i>Dynasty Warriors</i> in Japan. And that's rad.	🔥🔥🔥
PC	APR	HALF-LIFE 2 We're sorry to get excited...again.	🔥🔥🔥
XB	APR	RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2 Clean off your naked-lady mud flaps.	🔥

← DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
XB/PC	DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR Fortunately, the sum is greater than the parts.	9 ¹⁰
GC	1080 AVALANCHE NST sheds up the control scheme once again.	7 ¹⁰
GC	PAC-MAN VS. We're running a small fever.	8 ¹⁰
PC	STAR WARS: KOTOR The PC translation loses none of the awesomeness.	10 ¹⁰
PC	CONTRACT J.A.C.K. We don't agree to the terms of this contract.	5 ¹⁰
PC	PLANETSIDE: CORE COMBAT A nonessential expansion pack takes you underground.	6 ¹⁰
PC	BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON The best crate-puzzle adventure game we've played.	9 ¹⁰
PC	LORDS OF EVERQUEST You already have <i>WarCraft III</i> , so why buy it again?	5 ¹⁰
PS2	MANHUNT Technically competent, creatively incontinent.	8 ¹⁰
PS2	MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN This is the right way to do a sequel.	8 ¹⁰
PS2	FATAL FRAME 2 So is this.	8 ¹⁰
PS2/XB	SPYHUNTER 2 This...not so much.	4 ¹⁰
XB	COUNTER-STRIKE There's no reason to get this if you have the PC version.	6 ¹⁰
GC/PS2/XB	SONIC HEROES Heroes? More like...in the right place at the right time.	7 ¹⁰
GC/PS2/XB	R: RACING EVOLUTION It's devolution, baby.	6 ¹⁰
PS2	LOWRIDER Good for about 10 minutes of laughs. And that's it.	2 ¹⁰



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INFOMANIA!
THE LATEST ON...

PANDORA TOMORROW

Add one more feature to the growing list of innovations that Ubisoft's *Spider-Man: The Game* will bring to gaming: ambient A.I. In an effort to appeal to more gamers of different skill levels, SCPT will change its difficulty on the fly, morphing the behavior of enemy characters, scripted events in the level, and even parts of your environment—all in an effort to make the game enjoyable (and beatable) for all. It should also create much more believable behavior on the part of the computer-controlled guards and soldiers, who now work under different levels of alert and react more convincingly to your actions as you progress. The changes should be subtle enough that gamers won't even notice, other than to realize their experience has improved. **B+**

CLICKS
GO HERE NOW! PLURIM

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Have you ever heard the music in one of your favorite videogames and thought to yourself, "Gee, I'd love to be able to wait this tune on my guitar. That would rock harder than anything has rocked before!"? Head on over to Video Game Jam to download guitar and bass tablatures to your favorite game music. **B+**

[SCREEN]

ANIME REPORT
THIS MONTH'S FOUR BEST RELEASES

RATINGS: *Witch Hunter Robin* (13UP), *Android Kikaider* (13UP), *Last Exile* (13UP), *Yukikaze* (13UP)

→ Witch Hunter Robin (Bandai)
What makes a girl start fires? Maybe it's to burn out supernatural evil, but maybe it's just 'cause she can. Pyrokinesis is Robin's calling card in a rather dark and somber series about the hunt for rogue witches. Robin's quiet, shadowed style is an interesting change of pace for horror anime, and it's backed up by music from Taku Iwasaki (*Read or Die*).

Last Exile (Pioneer)
Its 10th anniversary has lit a fire under Studio Gonzo, once synonymous with shallow (if very pretty) productions. *Last Exile* takes Gonzo's gorgeous animation and marries it to real storytelling talent. Its awesome mecha designs bring to mind Hayao Miyazaki's fetish for fantastically overbuilt aircraft, but otherwise *Exile* has a harder edge—there's a touch of Captain Harlock in its epic airborne adventure.

Special features: The disc features an anamorphic widescreen picture (and typically perfect digital quality), and the

special edition box set includes a limited figurine and mouse pad.

Android Kikaider (Bandai)
To avoid any confusion, this isn't the '70s vintage live-action series starring the famous tormented robot crime fighter—it's the new-school animated series starring the famous tormented robot crime fighter. The Bandai-published remake delivers the best of both ages, making over retro robot designs with flashy modern animation.

Yukikaze (Bandai)
One of Gonzo's other 10th-anniversary projects is a little more like its past efforts, but we'll forgive anything that looks this good. *Kikaider* features the best digital dogfights since *Macross Plus*, as well as a cool story hook—the hero's experimental fighter is developing a mind of its own.

Special features: A short feature on the series' development, and you can hear the main program in 5.1-channel surround sound. **B+**



→ Each of this month's anime recommendations is a good time. But if we had to narrow it down to a couple of choices, we'd pick *Witch Hunter Robin* 'cause it's creepy and good, and *Last Exile* because of its awesome CG visuals and high-flying plot.

PLAYSTATION
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU
DON'T HAVE TO!

JOHN DAVISON

PS2 GOES LIVE

→ PS2 finally gets the online games it so deserves in the next few months, with more connected titles than not hitting shelves. At last I can look Evan in the eye and blow a hearty raspberry whenever he starts going on about how great Xbox Live is.

First up, we have the awesome *Champions of Norrath* from Sony Online, which, despite looking suspiciously like *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, is actually a remarkably enjoyable four-player co-op hackfest. Quickly following this is Ubisoft's *Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm*, which is an expanded standalone follow-up to an Xbox remake of an add-on of a PC remake. Did I get that right? It's considerably better than the first GR on PS2, and it takes a more-than-adequate stab at SOCOM-ness with 31 online maps and a bunch of co-op and combat modes. *Final Fantasy XI* hits in March, and aside from being superior to just about every other MMORPG out there, it also marks the unveiling of Sony's much-delayed hard-drive add-on for PS2.

Finally, at the end of March, we get *Resident Evil Outbreak*, an indiscribably weird online experience that lets you play as a zombie. Regardless of weirdness, it's a complete overhaul of the RE engine that points to the way future sequels might play. **B+**

John Davison is editor-in-chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

PC
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO

JEFF GREEN

NO JUSTICE

➔ The longer I'm in this business (going on 100 years now), the more I think that no one learns anything. Everyone makes the same mistakes over and over. Take Ubisoft. Please. Here they have two of the greatest games of the past year: *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* and *Beyond Good & Evil*. Both games, available on multiple platforms, are so good, so gorgeous, and so fun that both would be at the top of the charts if there was any justice.

But they're not. Instead, both are languishing on store shelves. Sales-wise they are considered "failures"—especially B&E, which, as of this writing, was already being marked down to as low as \$9.99 at some stores, just weeks after its release.

Why? Ubisoft blew it. And how did Ubisoft blow it? By shoving them out at the heart of the holiday season, when everyone else and their grandma were also releasing new games. So both games got totally lost in the shuffle.

Attention publishers: Gamers play games all year long, not just at Christmas. Stop glutting the market one freakin' month a year. We can't buy or play that many games at once. Here's hoping Ubisoft hangs on and rereleases them mid-year. But you don't have to wait that long at all. Go buy them now. They rule. **B+**

Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

TUP AWARDS

THE ONLINE-VELOPE. PLEASE

U.S.A.

➔ Amid the ocean of pain at the 2004 Consumer Electronics Show, there was at least one light in the storm: TUP.com's first annual TUP Awards. In a stylish ceremony at The Venetian hotel in Las Vegas, TUP recognized the best games of 2003, as selected by the readers of Ziff-Davis' fledgling online gaming destination.

In the RPG category, an American entry won going away—BioWare's *Knights of the Old Republic* received double the votes of Square's *Final Fantasy X-2*. The strategy category featured no such surprises, though, with *WarCraft III* topping *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. Halo nipped *SOCOM II* for shooter of the year, with *Rainbow Six 3* trailing by a surprisingly wide margin. But Ubisoft got its own back, winning top honors in action for the PS2 and GameCube versions of *Splinter Cell*.

The biggest category winner was *Soul*

Calibur II, with more than five times the votes of its nearest competition. Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* had an easy time of it as well, taking the adventure genre by a comfortable margin. The closest race came in sports, where Tony Hawk's *Underground* nipped Madden NFL 2004. And enough Nintendo fans joined together to push Mario Kart: *Dash!!* ahead of *Need for Speed Underground* for top racing honors.

The year's big winner, however, was the Star Wars franchise. Sony Online's *Star Wars Galaxies* topped *Final Fantasy XI* for online honors, making two categories in which Lucas trumped Square Enix. More surprising, however, was *KOTOR*'s big win. Not only did it knock off *FFX-2* for best RPG, it won the whole shebang, edging *Wind Walker* to become TUP's Game of the Year. **A+**

More info at: www.tup.com



RAINBOW SIX PS2

DON'T TURN THE PAGE. THIS IS MORE THAN A PORT

SHANGHAI

➔ Think the aging PS2 can't keep up with the competition? Don't tell Ubisoft, because it'll just shove a bunch of new *Rainbow Six 3* screens in your face. The Shanghai studio responsible for the excellent PS2 translation of *Splinter Cell* is once again squeezing everything it can out of Sony's hardware. Xbox players, don't turn the page just yet...you might be interested to know that the PS2 version isn't exactly the same game.

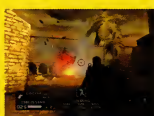
There are quite a few significant changes and tweaks: The detailed floor plans have been replaced by a simpler

radar system, which requires more caution when navigating your team through the levels. AI has been modified so that terrorists sometimes use hostages as human shields, and scripted events were added for more atmosphere. The story now includes a brand-new level, and the paths through older levels were altered.

But what's *Rainbow Six 3* without multiplayer? The PS2 version features split-screen co-op play for two, as well as online play for at least eight. And aside from two new and exclusive maps, PS2 players can keep in touch through

rankings, voice chat, and offline messaging.

We resist calling it a brand-new game, but the PS2 version of *Rainbow Six 3* is certainly more than a mere port. **A-**



[BLIPS]

FFXI hits 500,000

➔ Square Enix has announced that *Final Fantasy XI* has reached the milestone of 500,000 users on its PlayOnline service. Those users have created more than 1 million characters in the game. That many gamers cranking out \$12.95 a month sure buys a lot of chocolate feed.

Galleon goes to new publisher

➔ Interplay recently sold the rights to the long-delayed *Galleon: Islands of Mystery* to SCI Entertainment. Galleon is best known as the next game from original *Tomb Raider* creator Toby Gard and is currently slated for a spring 2004 release.



TENCHU

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evil reemerges,
so must those
who silence it.*

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ACTIVISION

activision.com

[TALENT]

★ TAKASHI IIZUKA

RINGING UP THE LEAD DESIGNER OF SONIC HEROES

➔ When one thinks of Sega's illustrious Sonic Team, and *Sonic the Hedgehog* in particular, the name Yuji Naka immediately springs to mind. But there's actually someone else responsible for the primary design work on Sega's No. 1 franchise. His name is Takashi Iizuka, and he took some time to chat with *GMR* about *Sonic Heroes*, the PS2, and—hold on to your funny hats—a new *NIGHTS*...

GMR: How is it working in the U.S. instead of Japan? How does this affect how you work?

TI: Sonic Team USA works in the United States to receive impressions directly from the Western market and to apply these impressions to our games. At the same time, we consider the characteristics of the Japanese market so that we can create "worldwide" marketable games. For example, we had U.S. consumer tests for *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* and *Sonic Heroes* during their development, and the tests' results are reflected in the final versions of the games.

GMR: Did *Sonic Heroes* meet your expectations? What do you feel you achieved with the game?

TI: In the *Sonic Adventure* games, you could control only one character at a time. Controlling multiple characters at the same time in *Sonic Heroes* makes the gameplay more fun. Of course, we encountered some problems (like maintaining the tempo between faster and slower characters), but through the development process we succeeded in expressing the fast action gameplay that the *Sonic Adventure* series captures so well.

GMR: Will we ever see another Sonic

game that's just Sonic, where he doesn't have to share the limelight?

TI: We will continue to think up new concepts, like *Sonic Heroes*' multiple-character gameplay. This time, we've gotten favorable comments from users regarding the gameplay, and we will create a new game that does not disappoint users.

GMR: Although Yuji Naka has said there won't be another *NIGHTS*, we still hold out hope—especially since most Sonic Team games feature some sort of *NIGHTS* homage. What, in your opinion, would it take to see another *NIGHTS* game? We think it would be great for GameCube.

TI: First, please let me note that I don't think Sonic Team has ever said there won't be another *NIGHTS*. *NIGHTS* is one of the most important properties at Sonic Team and Sega, so if we have the chance and can create a solid concept for a new *NIGHTS*, we will develop it. I was a designer on *NIGHTS* and would like to create another *NIGHTS* game in the future.

GMR: The PS2 version of *Sonic Heroes*

isn't as sharp as the other two versions, despite the Renderware connection. Is the PS2 just not as good at managing all that texture data?

TI: The performance of the Xbox and GC versions exceeds the performance of the PS2 version. If we had designed the game specifically for PS2, the quality of that version might have been better; however, we agreed on a median level of gameplay performance, then designed identical games across each console. Although the graphic memory of PS2 is lower than that of the others, we hope that users will be able to feel the same emotion and have a gameplay experience on par with the others.

GMR: What are you working on next?

TI: In 2003, we released many Sonic games—we can call 2003 the year of Sonic. On February 4, 2004, in Japan, we will release *Puyo Pop Fever*. Actually, we call the date *Puyo Day* since "two" can be read as "pu" and "four" in Japanese is "yo." As for the U.S., we are examining a new title right now, so please look forward to seeing it in the United States! ☛



XBOX KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



EVAN SHAMOON

HELLO, HALO

➔ The year of our Lord (Xbox) 2003 has come and gone, and there's still no sign of *Halo 2*. After repeated assurances that the game would "unquestionably" see release before the end of Q1 2004, reality is quickly demonstrating otherwise. All signs point to the game slipping once again—Microsoft has deferred early 2004 magazine coverage, and screenshots are arriving at a decidedly slow-drip pace.

What can we learn from this? For one, Microsoft is a corporation so huge that it simply does not need to do anything. While the end of Q1 would represent a firm financial deadline for most publicly traded companies with a title as significant as *Halo 2*, Microsoft has afforded Bungie enough time for its title to fully mature. Perhaps more interesting, however, is this: The longer Bungie takes to finish what most consider to be the world's most eagerly anticipated videogame, the less likely it will be that Bungie will be available to create an Xbox 2 launch title. A year and change to develop the next *Halo*? Highly unlikely. Expect another high-profile developer—our money is on Rare, as is Microsoft's—to provide Xbox 2's first big dance. ☛

...Evan Shamoon is an editor at *Xbox Nation*.

[BLIPS]

Mythic sues Microsoft

➔ In frivolous lawsuit news, *Dark Age of Camelot* developer Mythic Entertainment is suing Microsoft for copyright infringement. The software giant is developing an MMORPG called *Mythica*, and Mythic believes they will be brand confusion in the marketplace. Riiight.

Logitech force-feedback joystick

➔ Logitech has a force-feedback joystick for PS2 in the works. The Logitech Flight Force features a twist handle with four action buttons on it, another two buttons on the base, and an eight-way hat switch. The first game to support the stick will be Konami's *AirForce Delta Strike*.

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NINTENDO
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MARK MACDONALD

BRING IT!

➔ I got a few e-mails after my last column suggesting (to put it nicely) I write something positive about Nintendo. So this month, I thought I'd talk about a couple of my favorite GameCube games. First is *Nintendo Puzzle Collection*. The name pretty much says it all—three games, *Yoshi's Cookie*, *Dr. Mario*, and, best of all, a one-to-four-player version of the intense and thoroughly addictive *Tetris Attack* (aka *Pokémon Puzzle League*), all on one disc. Another recent GC fave is *WarioWare*, the big-screen version of the quirky GBA hit. It's got all the same bite-sized thrills as its handheld brother, plus a few extra games and an expanded multiplayer mode.

What's that you say? You've never heard of either of these games? That's because they aren't available in America. [Did you actually think I wouldn't find something to bitch about this month? Ha!] Despite the fact that these games have been out for months in Japan and would be easy to translate, plus GameCube's dire need of quality titles, we are still waiting for word on when either game will come to the United States. So, instead of sending that angry e-mail to me, why not send it to someone who might actually listen: nintendo@nintendo.com. [_Mark MacDonald](#) is executive editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*.

GMR CHARTS

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR DECEMBER '03

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND Something this popular shouldn't include "underground" in its title.	PS2	9
02	DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI 2 Cel-shaded or not, that guy's pointy hair still freaks us out.	PS2	7
03	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A. Fighting, shooting, driving recklessly...where else but L.A. would you set this game?	PS2	7
04	FINAL FANTASY X-2 Din final fantasy has something to do with Brooke Burke and a salami sandwich, but we digress.	PS2	9
05	MADDEN NFL 2004 Just in time for baseball season to start.	PS2	9
06	NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND Even Xbox gamers are feeling the need.	XB	9
07	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND We wear skateboard shoes and are always breaking bones—does that make us cool?	PS2	10
08	SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS We prefer virtual war to the real thing, thank you very much.	PS2	9
09	MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN That Pearl Harbor level can be described with one word: freakin' awesome.	PS2	7
10	GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK Tommy Vercetti never looked better. Except in the track suit.	XB	10

PS2 TOP 10

	SCORE
01 NFS UNDERGROUND	9
02 DBZ: BUDOKAI 2	7
03 TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.	7
04 FINAL FANTASY X-2	9
05 MADDEN NFL 2004	9
06 TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
07 SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS	9
08 MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN	7
09 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9
10 NBA LIVE 2004	8

XBOX TOP 10

	SCORE
01 NFS UNDERGROUND	9
02 GTA DOUBLE PACK	10
03 HALO	10
04 TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.	7
05 RAINBOW SIX 3	8
06 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9
07 MADDEN NFL 2004	9
08 DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR	9
09 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2	9
10 MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN	7

PC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 CALL OF DUTY	7
02 THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	TBD
03 HORIZONS	TBD
04 NWN: HORDES OF THE UNDER	TBD
05 THE SIMS: DELUXE	TBD
06 STAR WARS: KOTOR	10
07 FINAL FANTASY XI	8
08 THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	TBD
09 THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	6
10 URU: AGES OF MYST	6

GBA TOP 10

	SCORE
01 MARIO & LUIGI	9
02 SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
03 DRAGON BALL Z: TAIKETSU	TBD
04 YU-GI-OH! SACRED CARDS	TBD
05 THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	8
06 FIRE EMBLEM	8
07 PAC-MAN COLLECTION	TBD
08 SWORD OF MANA	6
09 NAMCO MUSEUM	TBD
10 FF TACTICS ADVANCE	9

GC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	10
02 MARIO PARTY 5	8
03 NFS UNDERGROUND	9
04 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9
05 THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN	8
06 SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9
07 YU-GI-OH! FALSEBOUND KING	TBD
08 TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	10
09 THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	5
10 SOUL CALIBUR II	9

who are you?



In the face of impossible odds, one warrior stood alone. Finally, the untold story behind the events that shaped Samus's destiny and forged her iron will is revealed in *Metroid: Zero Mission*. Only for Game Boy Advance.



EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Fantasy Violence

METROID
ZERO MISSION



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FOUND

GMR SCOURS THE GLOBE



KUBRICK ALIEN TOYS

The minute you see the first series, we guarantee you'll be sniping eBay, trying to get these suckers from hongkong_love_monkey for less than 40 bucks. Say what you will, but these are the sickest Kubricks based on any American license. Ever. Why? 'Cause the alien has retractable jaws. 'Cause Chase has a face hugger on him. 'Cause Ripley is in her underwear...no, that's not true. But that's the only thing this first series is lacking. What more do you want? Well, how about series two? Just released, it features the space jockey with eggs and a bloody Chase with a little critter actually coming through his chest!

See you on eBay, you little snipers. ☺☺

CLICKS

GOMERIE NOW FILMS



WWW.A-SEED.JP

The *Applesseed* series is back on again in this new, completely CG movie that's set to release in Japan this April. Masamune Shirow's classic manga tells the tale of Deunan Knute and Briaros, human/ogre lovers and police officers both. ☺☺

SHAMAN KING ME

KONAMI GETS ANOTHER LICENSE TO PRINT MONEY

JAPAN

➔ After the modest (or alternatively, monstrous) success of the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* franchise in its first year of U.S. release, it's no surprise to see Konami pick up another comic license from Shonen Jump. The next attempt at converting big-eyed action into gold is Hiroyuki Takei's *Shaman King*, currently running in the Jump anthology and on the Fox Kids TV lineup.

Konami has two games based on the license in the works for 2004, both developed by the Konami JPN studio that handles the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* license. Game Boy Advance will get a simple side-scrolling action game, while PS2 has something more interesting coming: a 3D hybrid of action, strategy, and RPG character development. Unlike

the PS2 *Yu-Gi-Oh!* games, and in something of a surprising turn for Konami, both games are original productions exclusively for the American market. Konami showed both at the Jump Festa event in Tokyo last December, but the games were clearly marked "for overseas release only."

So, what's the hook? *Shaman King* is your classic shonen action quest, following young Yoh Asakura and his spirit companion Amidamaru on Yoh's mission to become the world's greatest speaker to the dead. No prizes for guessing that there's a massive fighting tournament involved (the Great Tournament, to be precise, held every five centuries), although one wonders where the show goes during that 500-year wait... ☹ _Dave Smith



THE ULTIMATE

DEAD OR ALIVE ONLINE GETS A NEW NAME

JAPAN

➔ The software formerly known as *Dead or Alive* now has undergone slight identical surgery. Tecmo felt that the "Online" portion of the name conveyed only one dimension of the anticipated double-game set for Xbox, so it chose to alter the title to the slightly more exciting *Dead or Alive Ultimate*.

Developed by Team Ninja, *Dead or Alive Ultimate* will contain the original Sega Saturn version of the first DOA game (in Xbox-compatible form, naturally), which has never before been available in North America, as well as the greatly enhanced remake of DOA2: Hardcore. Using the all-new graphics engine created for DOAX Volleyball, Hardcore 2 will feature

expanded arenas and a whole new host of unlockable outfits for the characters. Interestingly, all future DOA titles will feature an online component, and the community formed by this will create the

Dead or Alive online experience. *Ultimate* will also feature a new CG movie, collectible trading cards, and an as-yet-unrevealed bonus feature. ☺☺ _James Mielke



More info at www.tecmo.com

[BLIPS]

Hold the Fries

➔ Microsoft Game Studios VP of games publishing Ed Fries (pronounced "Treeze") is leaving MS after 18 years to pursue other interests. The games studio has seen great growth in Ed's time, and the Xbox was launched under his stewardship. Good luck, Mr. Fries.

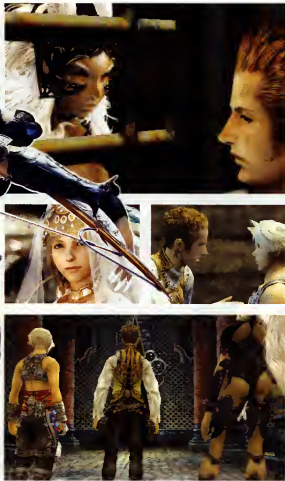
Sounds Korny

➔ According to MTV, Korn frontman Jonathan Davis is currently working on a fighting game featuring stars from the world of popular music. Entitled *Pop Stars*, it will include such talent as Marilyn Manson, Limp Bizkit, and Mary J. Blige (huh?) duking it out. Um, no

FIRST LOOK

COTTON TALES TOLD IN FFXII

JAPAN



➔ The cast of Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XII* has doubled in size and roughly quadrupled in hotness...if floppy ears get you off, anyway. Yasumi Matsuno and Akihiko Yoshida (the creative force behind *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Tactics Ogre*, among others) continue to put their stamp on the series, with the game's two new heroes both obvious echoes of *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Fran—the one with the floppy ears—is a viera, part of the humanoid race from *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. Her specialty is archery, as we saw in the *FFXII* trailer, but she's handy with any weapon and is a skilled martial artist as well. Her partner, Balflear, looks a little more conventional from the neck up. Everything below makes us wonder what his tailor's smoking, but Yoshida says this is his favorite *FFXII* design. Balflear's an engineer by trade, one of the tinkering gunslingers from the original *Tactics*, but like Fran, he's adept with a variety of arms. After the initial surprise of the first *FFXII* news, there's a bit less shock on display here, but Matsuno promises to go against expectations with the first details on his revised combat system for the series. **EE** _Dave Smith

More info at www.ffxii.com

ASKA



SHE'S THE
ARTISTIC TYPE.
THOUGH HER
ARTS ARE PURELY
MARTIAL.

CYBIRLS

09:27:36

GAMEPLANNER FEBRUARY 2004

WE CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF YOUR LOVE, BABY

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

SUNDAY

01

Today: *The Fast and the Furious* (PS2, XB), *He-Man: Defender of Eyraland* (XBL), and *Champions of Norrath* (PS2).

MONDAY

02

08

Melroid: *Zero Mission* (GBA), *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* (GC), *EverQuest: Gates of Discord* (PC), *Cyber the Third* (PS2), *Go girl, aim*

TUESDAY

03

AirForce Delta Strike and *Elite Final* for PS2 take flight today. We strongly suggest that you take the series as grounded.

WEDNESDAY

04

11

Silent Scope Complete (XBL), *Apocalypse* (PS2), *Winning Eleven 7* (PS2), *Mega Guken DM1*, *Round 400: Everything* (PS2), *Ultimate Street Fighter Unleashed* (PS2, XBL) are out today.

THURSDAY

05

12

If Abraham Lincoln were still alive, he'd be 195 years old today. That's not a scare and 19 years more would give him a few more years to live.

FRIDAY

06

Barbershop 2 opens today, much to the delight of personal profiler and activist Jesse Jackson.

SATURDAY

07



14

Baby, it's Valentine's Day, and GMR wants to tell you just how much you really mean to us...and, and...

Many, this is hard to say... We love you.



13

The conclusion of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* begins its theatrical run today. We'll bet you a dollar that this movie will be the best killed in *Kill Bill 2*. Tarantino is wacky like that.

15

Pickups and catches report *All-Star Baseball 2005* is out for PS2. So is *Black 'n' Mad Unleashed*. That last one is out for Xbox, too.

17

Rise to Honor, the Jet Li game that feels like it was based on a Jet Li movie but was really originally meant to be just for Jet Li. It's available for PlayStation 2.

19



20

The conclusion of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* begins its theatrical run today. We'll bet you a dollar that this movie will be the best killed in *Kill Bill 2*. Tarantino is wacky like that.

21



22



24

Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge and *Shining Soul II* for GBA. *Heathcote: Redemption* and *Atlas* for PS2 and *Atlas* for Xbox. *Cart Expulsion* for all.

25



26

Only Dancing Havana debuts today. That's all we and good for the night. But where's the *Postcard* sequel?

28



29

We're going to get philosophical on you now. Today is Leap Day—an extra day of life—so go do something you've never done before. It's a rare occurrence in the nubs.

ICES LA VIE

THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW INDUCES DROOL

LAS VEGAS

➔ We hate the Consumer Electronics Show. Like clockwork every year, every major gadget manufacturer trots out the dopest new gear for the upcoming year. And without fail, we see more stuff than we can ever afford. Case in point: Sanyo's prototype of a 40-inch flatscreen television, which actually projects a 3D image. You read that right—a large, plasma 3D television. Sanyo doesn't have final pricing and isn't sure if the set will even be ready for 2004, but it looks sweet. Speaking of which, Sharp was busy pimping its notebook, which sports a 3D screen. And here's a little tidbit we learned from a Sharp employee at the booth: Nintendo has already approached the company about using this technology in its next Game Boy. Hey, from the company that brought you the headache-inducing Virtual Boy, anything is possible. Unfortunately, Nintendo was unavailable for comment at press time.

A very reliable source also told us that the next Xbox will support 7.1 digital surround. Sounds good to us. Enough with the rumors and promises of things that aren't ready yet, though. Let's get to the game-related stuff.

DESIGNYARD'S GAMEDECK



www.thegamedeck.com

"All that's missing from this thing is the ball gag." That's the first reaction we had when we passed this PC game station on the show floor. Featuring solidly built industrial metal welded together and pimped out, this rig looks almost too intimidating to use. Hell, the metal supports swing out so that you can strap into this geek cockpit. But once you sit your ass down, the thing is pretty comfortable—ergonomic even. It damn well better be, considering the setup can run you as much as six grand. Like a freakin' Transformer, the keyboard trays can push back to make room for flight sticks and wheels that pull down and lock into place. If you're this dedicated to your gaming, get outside and breathe some fresh air every once in a while. Still, it sure beats the hell out of your current PC setup.

APEX DIGITAL APEXTREME

The idea is an interesting one: Play PC games on your television in the

living room. There's just the small fact that it's a damn PC game! How are ya gonna get the necessary horsepower into a set-top console for 400 clams? And while we're asking questions, will the 1.2GHz CPU and 256MB of RAM be enough to play a game? Can the 128MB video card really perform like an ATI Radeon 9100 series card? Well, using the DISCover chip and a stripped-down version of Windows XP Pro should mean faster performance—we just don't have any info on how much faster yet. What we can tell you is that the deck looked fine playing Madden 2004 on a regular TV set. And for those craving all the fun that is PC game patches, Apex promises to make your life a little easier. With a live Internet connection [broadband or dial-up], the deck hooks into GameSpy Arcade and automatically updates drivers and install patches.



www.apexdigitalinc.com



www.samsungusa.com

SAMSUNG HT-DB390 HOME THEATER-IN-A- BOX KIT

Attention, lazy bastards. By making everything simple and putting together everything you need, a home-theater-in-a-box kit is built for you. Not me, though—I'm really lazy. I don't want to wire the house or move furniture, and I won't have to, since the speakers in Samsung's new box are wireless. Battery-powered and transmitting via Bluetooth, the speakers can go just about anywhere you want in the living room. No word on the effective range, but it should be good enough for the job at hand. Beyond the speakers, the kit also includes a sleek progressive-scan DVD player and the all-important digital optical input so that you can plug your Xbox or PS2 directly into the kit. As a side note, it seems like everyone had the same idea this year. I counted no less than four different companies working on wireless-speaker solutions. It's just that at 500 bucks, this solution seemed the most reasonable. ☛

—Darren Gladstone

SHE'D LOVE TO
TAKE YOU OUT.
FROM 20 METERS.

CYBERGIRLS

07:18:54

ON THE CHEAP

BUDGET GAMES ARE PEOPLE, TOO

• JAPAN

In Japan, the *Simple 2000* series offers gamers guilty pleasures at modest prices (\$20 or so). 2D shooters, humble sports games, classic puzzle games (like *Othello*), and pure action titles make up a large part of the series' library. We show you a few of the best. Don't be surprised to see some of these come to the States as budget titles. Also, Sega gets in on the fun.

SIMPLE 2000 SERIES VOL. 31 EARTH DEFENSE FORCE



➔ If you dug Square Enix's oddball *Robot Alchemic Drive*, its developer created a spiritual sequel in *Earth Defense Force, Simple 2000 Series Vol. 31*. There's no giant robot to command, but that's the only weapon Sandlot left out. You get 100 different armaments plus easily driven vehicles, and you'll need every one to waste the invading hordes of UFOs, robots, and giant mutant ants (mmmm, ants!). In a surprising turn for a budget game, the developers also offer a full-blown multiplayer mode with versus and cooperative action.

The game plays like a dream, and is one of the best pure action titles to be found on the PlayStation 2. The single character design is a little too retro (think *Thunderbirds*) for our taste, but when a game plays this well, we'll live with it. **C+**

SIMPLE 2000 SERIES VOL. 37 THE SHOOTING



➔ Strictly speaking, this is *Simple 2000 Series Vol. 37 The Shooting*, but arcade fiends played it as *Shenryu*. Warashi's 1997 arcade release comes from an odd quarter for a PS2 port—it was made for the Saturn-based ST-V hardware—but there's no point in passing up a new vertical shooter. Its gameplay echoes the familiar *Raiden* series, but with much more variety than simply red and blue ships. The cast includes six different playable characters, plus bonus stages to unlock beyond the basic eight-level campaign.

Will XS Games, publisher of the hideously packaged *Mobile Light Force* games (actually the wonderful *Gunbird* and *Shikigami No Shiro* in disguise), snap up *The Shooting* for U.S. release? We can only hope. **C+**

SIMPLE 2000 ULTIMATE SERIES VOL. 15 LOVE*PING-PONG



➔ *Lust Ping-Pong* would probably be a more accurate title, but we'll leave D3 Publisher its illusions of class. And there's no reason to knock *Love Ping-Pong* more than necessary—it would be a fun game of table tennis even without the low-rent knocker physics. Tamsoft (developer of *Guardian's Crusade*, oddly enough) threw in real ping-pong strategy and alternate swing styles on top of the fetish costumes, although there are 12 of those for each of the 12 characters if playing dress-up with overendowed girls is all you're after.

A couple of smaller U.S. game publishers are currently spying this game—as well as its cousin *Love Upper* (a boxing game)—for possible Stateside release as a budget title, but no announcements have yet been made. *Ping? Pong.* **C+**

SEGA AGED

THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF SOLID GOLD

➔ Proving it hasn't completely fallen off the face of the earth, Conspiracy Entertainment has picked up the rights to publish 14 (that's fourteen!) 3D Ages remakes for PS2 in the U.S. The first five releases—budget-priced Sega arcade and console classics remade with new-school 3D

graphics—are coming by the end of March, so mark your calendars for *Fantasy Zone*, *Monaco GP*, *Space Harrier*, the original *Phantasy Star*, and *Golden Axe*. Or the first four, anyway, since unlike its pleasantly retro brethren, the *Golden Axe* remake is mind-blowingly sub-*Dynomite Cop* bad. **C+**



FUCHIKOMA!

GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX

● JAPAN

➔ The *Ghost in the Shell* PSX game had a critical flaw: It had an extremely hot heroine, but did nothing with her. Sure, the Fuchikoma tanks are cute, but why leave Major Kusanagi in the cut-scenes?

Cavia, coming off Square Enix's *Drag-On Dragoon* (coming to the States this spring as *Drakengard*), has its priorities considerably straighter. *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* has enough cyber sex appeal for both games, and Fuchikoma fans aren't left out, either.

Stand Alone Complex, coming to Japan for PS2 this March, is based on a recent Japanese TV series. Unlike

the *Ghost in the Shell* movie, SAC has an episodic plot based on Masamune Shirow's original manga series.

The Major takes the lead for Japan's Section 9 counter-terrorism squad, but she's not the only playable character. As the plot dictates, she swaps the spotlight with her partner Batou—his levels favor a brute-force approach, while the Major has her hacking skills and unlimited martial-arts mojo.

SCEA will probably ignore the game, but it may follow the SAC TV series Stateside this year. It's looking too good for a publisher like Bandai to pass up. **1C**



➔ Kusanagi's kicks will hit Japan with full force this March, a mere hop, skip, and jump away from now. Will it come to the U.S.? Chances are, when a game looks this good, yes.



CHAOTIC FUN

GMR LOOKS AT SNK VS. CAPCOM CHAOS

● JAPAN

➔ It's been almost four years since Capcom first unleashed the mother of all 2D matchups—*Capcom vs. SNK*—causing both excitement and confusion (hardcore players griped that the balance was all over the place). Bringing the two premier fighting powerhouses together for the first time, *CYS* pits each publisher's best against the other's in a brawl filled with in-jokes and wall-to-wall fighting.

Now the reborn SNK has its own take on the concept, *SNK vs. Capcom Chaos*. *SVCC* for PS2 offers fast action and big, if dated-looking, characters. Capcom fans will delight in rarities such as Tabata (from the *CSIII's* Warzard), while SNK fanatics can play with *Art of Fighting's* Mr. Karate and the "Mars People" from *Metal Slug 3*. Lucky for you, SNK is tentatively planning to release *SVCC* in the U.S. later this year. Hadden! **1C**



➔ SNK's *Mai* slaps Capcom's *Hugo* in the fanny pack. Good times like this can be had when *SVCC* hits the States later this year.

2 GIRLS.
2 WORLDS.
1 HARDCORE
MISSION.



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EVIL FROM THE REAL WORLD INTO
CYBERSPACE, WHERE THE RULES
ARE RADICALLY DIFFERENT -
BUT THE ACTION'S EVERY
BIT AS HARDCORE.

CYBIRLS

PlayStation 2



Blood
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

KONAMI

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COVER STORY



FOUR ON THE FLOOR

STAR WARS REPUBLIC COMMANDO

GO INSIDE THE MASK OF LUCASARTS' SQUAD-BASED FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

BY DVS, XBLPC, PAUL LUCASARTS, DEU, LUCASARTS, REL, DVS, PAUL 2004

➔ It wasn't until about three-quarters of the way through *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones* that the grueling puppy love and mock infatuation of Anakin and Padmé gave way to the infinitely cooler Jedi gate-crashing and Yoda flip kicks. While the funky arrival of Samuel L. Jackson's saber-wielding Mace Windu certainly bookmarked the end of the sappy heartfelt dialogue, it more significantly heralded the arrival of the grand army of the Republic, aka Jango Fett's your baby's daddy, aka the clone troopers. In LucasArts' upcoming squad-based first-person shooter *Republic Commando*, you are a member of the faceless clone army. You're nothing but a number. A grunt. A meatbag, some would say. Specifically, you are part of the second-toughest pack of clones the Republic army has to offer, and for this dubious distinction, you're paid in punishment. You're sent on the missions that would crush the low-level maggots, and then some. This is your lot in life. You're a Republic commando.

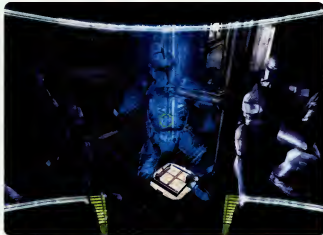
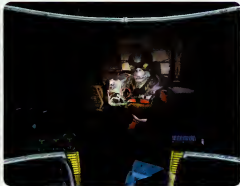
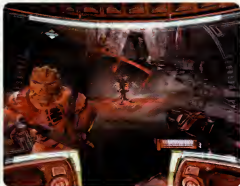
Taking place shortly after the events of *Episode II*, *Republic Commando* attempts to fill the gap that occurs between Senator Palpatine's installment as Chancellor of the Republic—and that period's burgeoning political unrest—and the outright ascension of the Empire. Although you'll never quite reach the time frame of *Episode III*, *Commando* foreshadows what we already know (that the stormtroopers ultimately become the bad guys). As you might surmise, suppressing the Separatist uprising is a large part of your squad's role in the game.

Played out over three distinct (and enormous) locations—starting with the Battle of Geonosis, moving on to the massive Republic Capital Ship (itself a precursor to the Death Star), and landing, finally, on the jungle-filled Wookiee world of Kashyyyk—*Commando*'s focus lies in the thrill of highly coordinated combat. You are not alone. Similar in execution to *Rainbow Six 3*, *Commando* flips the script a little by teaming you with three fellow clones in a squad culled from the 10,000 or so soldiers that make up the commandos. Of the

million or so troops that the Republic wields, the commandos, whose real-world equivalent would be on par with the U.S. Navy SEALs or Army Rangers, are in the top one percent. Only the fearsome handful of ARC troopers surpasses the commando's level of training and ability.

Now that you've come to grips with your place in this man's army, you (No. 38, to be precise) and your similarly designated brethren should know how things work around here. It's been a while since LucasArts has developed a first-person shooter in-house. That said, the company is eager to point out the game's focus, which is to put you, the player, behind the mask. You're not the lone ranger that *Halo*'s Master Chief is, nor are you the thinking man's first-person hero, Gordon Freeman. You're a number, and the only thing you have to worry about is getting your damn job done. Better get used to it.

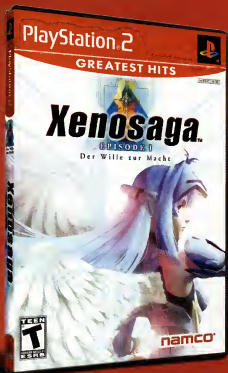
This concept works great in practice. No videogame genre can put you in the shoes of your subject matter like the first-person shooter, and in *Commando*, you are living the life. All the



← Your visor may very well be your most important tool in *Republic Commando*, as it is also your heads-up display. The various glowing bars indicate your overall physical condition, as well as things like how much shield-energy you have remaining. Your ammo-count is then highlighted directly on each weapon. It's a clean and functional interface that helps immerse you in the action, with minimal distraction.



EPIC REVIEWS. EPIC SAGA. EPIC HIT.



"...an interstellar otherspace opus of the most magnificent kind..."

—GamePro, 4.5 out of 5

"...one of the coolest stories you'll encounter..."

—Official PlayStation Magazine, 4 out of 5

"...Xenosaga is to video games as the original Star Wars is to movies."

—GMR, 9 out of 10

"Xenosaga is truly a triple-A title..."

—Game Informer, 9.75 out of 10

"Calling this game epic would be an understatement."

—IGN

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PlayStation.2

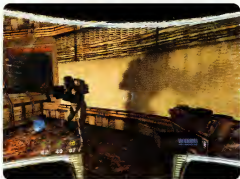
information you need is right there in your visor's heads-up display. Your shield strength (similar to Master Chief's energy shield), which recharges if you can avoid taking sustained damage, and your overall health are displayed on the HUD.

Likewise, your ammo count is highlighted on the weapons themselves. And since the majority of the game's cut-scenes take place in first person, even when you're merely watching a real-time cinematic, you really feel like part of this tightly knit squad, doing your part when and where instructed to. Occasionally, characters like Yoda or Mace Windu will make an appearance (remember, the clone troopers are not yet the forces of evil), but only in peripheral roles—usually to comment on your progress or issue mission details.

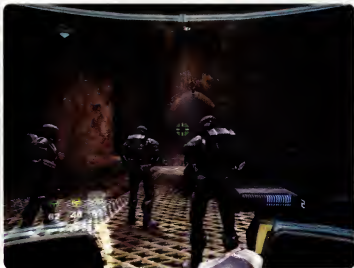
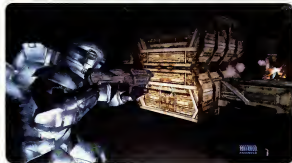
One early mission, for example, takes place in the Geonosis area. Designed to give you a fresh perspective on the Republic's military maneuvers—a perspective rarely seen in the *Star Wars* movies—you hit the ground running as part of a special commando unit with orders from Mace Windu to assassinate a high-ranking

Geonosian official. Naturally, there is some stiff opposition waiting for you at nearly every turn.

The stage we saw was exceptionally large, going on for what seemed like ages. As your character makes his way down tight corridors, one of your boys watches your six while the other two cover the flanks and you take the lead. Every so often, a Geonosian will exchange gunfire with you (weapons in *Republic Commando* use both ballistic and energy-based ammunition), at which point you have a number of options. You can take the enemy head-on or pull back as your crew steps up and starts throwing heat. Or you can survey your surroundings, take advantage of a vacant turret, and blast the opposition to pieces. Or, possibly, issue a command for a member of your party to assume turret duty while the rest of you take up strategic formations. Delegating orders to your crew is as easy as pointing a crosshair at a spot, and if your trooper can physically get there, bam, that's it. Doors can be opened with finesse via security hacking or kicked down and cleared, *Rainbow* style. Strategy is as big a part of the *Star Wars* universe as it is in



← Telling your team where to go is as easy as point and click. If you want to move one clone to a specific point to lay down covering fire, aim at the spot and press a button. See an idle turret that could use some attention? Stick a man on it and put it to good use!



THE MOST ACCLAIMED GAME OF THE YEAR

FIVE OUT OF FIVE STARS
EDITOR'S CHOICE

- *GameSpy*

93%
EDITOR'S CHOICE
- *PC Gamer*

90%
- *Gamers.com*

94%
- *Gamerankings.com*

FIVE OUT OF FIVE
- *GamePro.com*

3 1/2 STARS OUT OF 4
- *The Associated Press*

4 1/2 STARS OUT OF 5
EDITOR'S CHOICE

- *Computer Gaming World*

9.3
EDITOR'S CHOICE
- *IGN*

9.0
EDITOR'S CHOICE
- *Gamespot*

A+
- *UGO*

FIVE OUT OF FIVE STARS
- *Maxim*

90%
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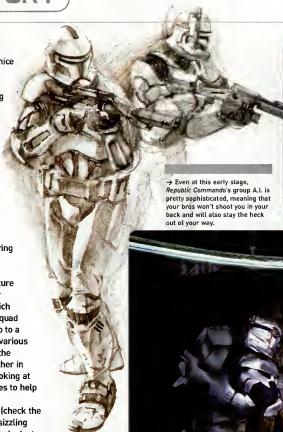
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more "realistic" games, and your teammates' lives depend on it. A nice bonus is the ability to heal your partners or have them heal you.

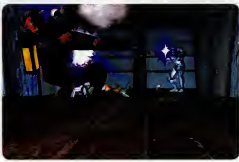
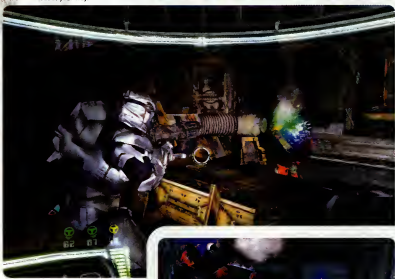
Your arsenal, obviously, is a big factor in your success, which makes the versatile multifunction DC17 assault rifle your bread and butter. *Commando* enables you to upgrade your standard-issue DC17 with antiarmor and sniper-rifle attachments, giving you plenty of lethal options without requiring you to pick up (and discard) tons of disposable weapons. Plus, you can carry a second weapon (a Wookiee bowcaster, perhaps) as well, offering flexibility in how you approach an area.

Perhaps the most exciting feature in *Commando* is its online play (for both Xbox Live and PC users), which allows you to join a four-person squad and go up against other teams (up to a maximum of 16 people) online in various modes of play. Unlike in *Halo*, all the players will not look like one another in multiplayer, as the dev team is looking at adding decals and optional textures to help distinguish different teams.

Factor in the superb visuals (check the screenshots for proof) and some sizzling 5.1 surround sound, and LucasArts looks to be on the verge of another great crossover hit. How compelling the mission objectives are and the quality of the overall game balance will determine whether *Commando* is the stuff of legend or just a cash in on the ol' *Star Wars* license, but judging from the evidence at hand, LucasArts is certainly on the right track. *Republic Commando* ships this fall. **E**



→ Even at this early stage, *Republic Commando's* group A.I. is pretty sophisticated, meaning that your bros won't shoot you in your back and will also stay the heck out of your way.



WHAT'S IN A HELMET BESIDES YOUR HEAD?



In a bit of interesting fanservice, Temuera Morrison, the actor who played Jango Fett in *Episode II*, is providing the voice for the clones, which is fitting, since Fett's DNA was the basis for the clone army in the first place. And if you are wondering if it's coincidence that Jango Fett's and the commando troopers' helmets look so similar, it's not. That was a deliberate nod.



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KNOW YOUR STORMTROOPERS

Republic commandos are cool and all that, but where exactly do they fit in the pecking order? Are they the peckers or the pecked? Our handy list shows you just where these frosty tough-guys land in the never-ending career ladder to the top.



SUPREME COMMANDER
CHANCELLOR PALPATINE



REPUBLIC GENERALS

Composed mainly of Jedi and personnel loyal to the Chancellor.

CLONE COMMANDERS

Commanders supervise on the battlefield, overseeing both regular army and commando units.

SPECIAL UNITS

Support units and specialized jobs require soldiers with unique skills. Many are deployed regularly on the battlefield, others are kept secret.

- EVAC PILOTS
- REPUBLIC GUNSHIPS
- ARC TROOPERS

REPUBLIC COMMANDOS

The Republic commandos have been genetically modified to handle the stress and aggression of unorthodox combat tactics. Independent, ruthless, and fierce, the Republic commando is a whole different breed of soldier.



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SQUAD LEADER



THE PLAYER

SQUAD MEMBERS

Yours to command



SPECIALIST 1



SPECIALIST 2



SPECIALIST 3

REGULAR ARMY

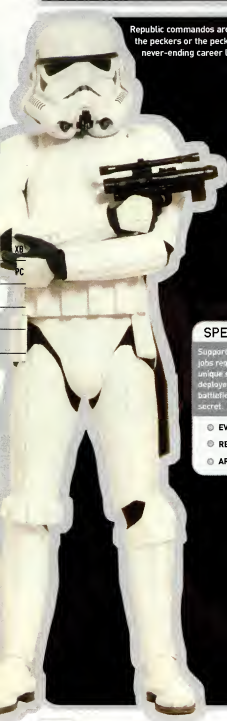
Over one million clones were created as intensely loyal, single-minded infantry cannon fodder. Led by captains and sergeants.

CLONE CAPTAIN

CLONE LIEUTENANTS

CLONE SERGEANTS

CLONE TROOPERS



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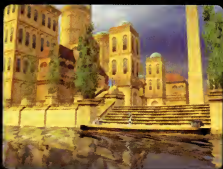
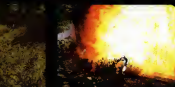
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A dynamic action scene from the Star Wars Battlefront video game. In the center, a Stormtrooper in white armor is firing a large, glowing red energy weapon. To the left, a Rebel soldier in a green uniform and cap aims a blaster. The background is filled with intense orange and yellow explosions and the skeletal remains of a destroyed AT-AT walker. The scene is set on a dusty, war-torn battlefield under a dark sky.

ON A BATTLEFIELD FAR, FAR, AWAY, STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT DIGS IN.



→ Some kids played army growing up, others played Star Wars. The difference? Instead of saying "bang bang!" they screamed a falsetto "pichoo pichoo!" Don't worry, *Star Wars Battlefront* will take care of the sound effects for you, and the costumes are much more authentic as well.



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

► SYSTEM PS2, XB, PC ► PUBLISHER LUCASFILMS ► DEVELOPER PANDEMIC STUDIOS ► RELEASE DATE FALL 2004

➔ Describing this game takes just one journalistically lazy line: *Battlefield 1942* meets *Star Wars*. But reducing it to such simple terms diminishes how cool the game looks and how much fun we know we'll have once we're playing it on our PCs, Xboxes, and PS2s this fall. After all, *Battlefield 1942* was called *Tribes Meets World War II* when it first hit the market, but that didn't slow it down one bit.

Currently in development at Pandemic Studios—the team that brought you *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*—*Star Wars Battlefront* places teams of gamers playing as the Empire or the Rebels in massive multiplayer battles fought on battlefields familiar to fans of the *Star Wars* movies. It's also the first game to include classic *Star Wars* content on PS2, the system on which it will first be released. It will also support voice chat for PS2, Xbox, and PC for up to 32 players.

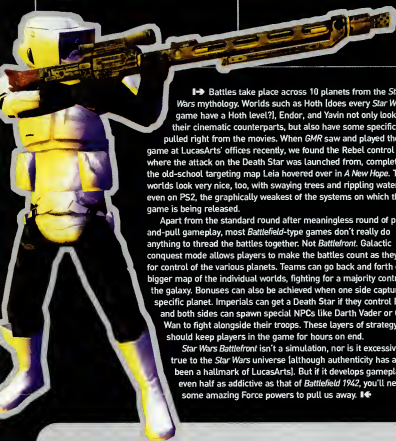
There are two (or four) sides to choose from, depending on how you look at it. You can pit Rebels against the Empire in the galactic civil war of Episodes IV through VI, or choose the more recent Episodes I through III, which feature the Separatists and the Republic fighting in the Clone Wars. You can play as one or the other—there's no mixing the eras. Once you choose one of the four sides—Rebel Alliance, Imperial Army, Clone

Army, or Battle Droids—you'll pick from one of five classes (which are still to be finalized as of press time), each with its own weapons and unique abilities. For instance, Imperial officers can spawn a probe droid (like those seen on Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back*), which can unleash a devastating aerial bombardment. And pilots can repair vehicles (any class can use one) and are automatically ejected when their ride is destroyed.

Ah yes, vehicles. Of course there will be vehicles in *Battlefront*, some with multiple positions for players to take up. An Imperial speeder bike may be a one-stormtrooper affair, but you'll want to grab a gunner if you're going to lumber up to the enemy defenses in an AT-AT.

Like *Battlefield*, or any game that involves class-based team fighting, finding the right balance between the units—exchanging firepower for speed, making devastating weapons more rare and infrequent, etc.—will be the key to *Battlefront*'s success with the online gaming community. You don't want everyone on the map running around as the same class just because it's so badass. ➔





→ Battles take place across 10 planets from the Star Wars mythology. Worlds such as Hoth (does every Star Wars game have a Hoth level?), Endor, and Yavin not only look like their cinematic counterparts, but also have some specific areas pulled right from the movies. When GMR saw and played the game at LucasArts' offices recently, we found the Rebel control room where the attack on the Death Star was launched from, complete with the old-school targeting map Leia hovered over in *A New Hope*. The worlds look very nice, too, with swaying trees and rippling water—even on PS2, the graphically weakest of the systems on which the game is being released.

Apart from the standard round after meaningless round of push-and-pull gameplay, most *Battlefield*-type games don't really do anything to thread the battles together. Not *Battlefront*. Galactic conquest mode allows players to make the battles count as they fight for control of the various planets. Teams can go back and forth on a bigger map of the individual worlds, fighting for a majority control of the galaxy. Bonuses can also be achieved when one side captures a specific planet. Imperials can get a Death Star if they control Endor, and both sides can spawn special NPCs like Darth Vader or Obi-Wan to fight alongside their troops. These layers of strategy should keep players in the game for hours on end.

Star Wars *Battlefront* isn't a simulation, nor is it excessively true to the Star Wars universe (although authenticity has always been a hallmark of LucasArts). But if it develops gameplay even half as addictive as that of *Battlefield 1942*, you'll need some amazing Force powers to pull us away. ←



→ Vehicles are a huge part of the game and include such favorites as X-Wings, speeder bikes, snow-speeders, and the AT-ST pictured here.

THREE'S A CROWD

As if battling one enemy for control points weren't enough trouble, certain maps in *Battlefront* will introduce the added complication of a third computer-controlled opponent to mess up your day. Some will fight on a particular side, others will disrupt everyone. Here's a look at a couple of the unwelcome visitors you can expect to see:

TUSHEN RAIDERS

When on Tatooine, listen closely for the plaintive howl of Tusken Raiders waiving along the dunes. It means a bantha stick is headed for your face. The Tusken Raiders play like their own team, taking and holding control points while fighting both sides. Perhaps some temporary alliances will be seen to eradicate these buggers.



EWOKS

Everyone's favorite leather-clad teddy bears are back to fight on the Rebel Alliance's side in the battle for Endor. Expect their usual bag of tricks and traps like falling logs and vine snares, which they apparently learned from the Viet Cong, to cause all kinds of havoc for the Empire. And expect them to be very, very cute.



GEONOSIANS

The Geonosis homeworld is known for its droid foundries, so it's somewhat natural that the insectoid Geonosians would fight on the side of their metal masters against the Republic troops during Clone War battles. Rumors of a huge flyswatter weapon or a bug spray upgrade in the game remain just that.



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STAR WARS: THE LIGHT AND DARK

THE BEST AND WORST GAMES FROM YOUR FAVORITE FAR, FAR AWAY GALAXY

We've seen a lot of *Star Wars* games over the years. Some of them are pretty darn deserving of the name, while others are about as useful as a \$50 coaster. Here are five *Star Wars* games you should check out—and five that you should avoid at all costs.

THE LIGHT SIDE

THE FIVE BEST STAR WARS GAMES OF ALL TIME



01

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

2003 | XB/PC

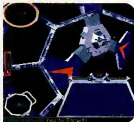
➔ BioWare, developer of the hit *Baldur's Gate* series, hit a solid home run with this one. Flexible combat mechanics, an ambitious story, great voice acting, and a slew of character options (thanks to the constant light/dark Jedi struggle) add up to one of the best and most replayable RPGs ever created.



02 TIE FIGHTER

1995 | PC

➔ This magnificent sequel to the hit *X-Wing* managed to hit all the right notes with eager *Star Wars* fans by re-creating the epic space battles of the classic films and putting players in the driver's seat—this time as the bad guys. Die, Rebel scum!



03 DARK FORCES

1995 | PC

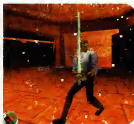
➔ Back in the formative years of the first-person-shooter genre, the PC gaming industry was awash with cheap *Doom* knockoffs. LucasArts went the extra mile with the top-notch *Dark Forces*, which puts players in the shoes of a Rebel for plenty of fast-paced, stormtrooper-bashing *Star Wars* fun.



04 JEDI KNIGHT: DF II

1997 | PC

➔ Like *Dark Forces*, *Jedi Knight* was a stand-out shooter in a crowd of second-rate clones. This game built significantly on its predecessor, adding a cool light side/dark side element of choice to the story—not to mention the ability to wield a lightsaber and pull off plenty of badass Jedi stunts.



05 EPISODE I: RACER

1999 | NB4/PC

➔ A lot of things can be said about *Star Wars Episode I*, and, well, most of them are pretty bad. Plenty of terrible games came in the wake of the less-than-stellar movie, but *Episode I: Racer's* pulse-pounding re-creation of the film's pod-race scene definitely makes it stand out in the crowd.



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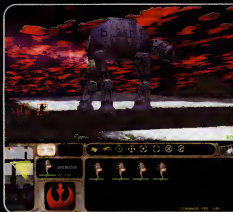


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THE DARK SIDE

THE FIVE WORST STAR WARS GAMES OF ALL TIME



01

FORCE COMMANDER 2000 | PC

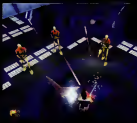
➔ Force Commander puts players in control of various Rebel and Imperial forces in an RTS evocation of the films' ground battle sequences. Badly dated visuals and a horrible interface mean you'd be better off re-creating said battles with your SW action-figure collection.

02| DEMOLITION
2000 | PS1, DC

➔ Back when vehicular combat was all the rage, Demolition attempted to ape the success of such franchises as Twisted Metal. Unfortunately, it feels like little more than a jumble of Star Wars vehicles and creatures (and Boba Fets) with some pretty crappy gameplay thrown in.

04| THE PHANTOM
MENACE 1999 | PS1/PC

➔ The last thing anyone wanted after watching Star Wars Episode I was a tie-in game. This third-person "adventure" combines horrid visuals, borderline retarded combat, and myriad badly executed puzzles into an experience that should be missed by everyone.

03| MASTERS OF TERÄS
KÄSI 1997 | PS1

➔ The thought of a Star Wars fighting game is kind of cool. Unfortunately, the reality is much worse. Stiff, jerky controls and a handful of grossly unbalanced characters turn this 3D fighter into a case of wishful thinking gone horribly awry. Steer clear, young Padawan—Soul Calibur this ain't.

05| OBI-WAN
2001 | XB

➔ A lot of people were expecting a Jedi Knight-esque experience with Obi-Wan, but they got a shoddy third-person action game full of repetitive combat sequences, badly scripted cut-scenes, and huge, empty levels. If you're looking for a good Star Wars action game, just play Jedi Knight.



THE WEIRD SIDE

EMBARRASSING MOMENT IN STAR WARS HISTORY

Sure, there've been a ton of bad Star Wars games (ahem, Super Bombad Racing), but none as weird as Namco's Star Wars for the Japanese Famicom (you know it as NES over here). How strange is it? Well, the first level ends with an epic battle in the bowels of the Jawas' sandcrawler...where Luke fights Darth Vader...who turns into a giant scorpion. Uh yeah.

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Mild Language
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ON THE CUTTING

Chances are you've played a game by Keiji Inafune. If you've ever touched a *Mega Man* game, you've touched his work. Should one of the *Onimusha* titles have passed before your eyes, that too is the handiwork of one of Capcom's most prolific creators.

One day we found him hitching on the 101 just outside the Bay Area, so we picked him up. After we had him buckled in snugly, we proceeded to ask him all about his upcoming projects: *Onimusha Blade Warriors*, and more importantly, the star vehicle *Onimusha 3*, featuring the talents of Takeshi Kaneshiro (*Returner*), Jean Reno (*Léon: The Professional*), and Donnie Yen (*Iron Monkey*, *Shanghai Knights*).

GMR: What makes Nobunaga such a popular enemy? He's a central figure in a lot of Japanese games.

KI: Nobunaga is probably the most famous historical figure in Japan. He started with very little power, but through his strength and his leadership he was able to very nearly unite the entire country.

He is the perfect blend of good and evil. It's easy to make him a hero, but he also killed every single person that ever got in his way, so we can also portray him the way we

do in the *Onimusha* series. In a way, he symbolizes power, both good and bad.

GMR: It's funny, you probably wouldn't see many game developers portraying George Washington in the same way. Where did the premise of *Onimusha 3* come from?

KI: During the development of *Onimusha 1*, one of the planners threw out this idea: The game is based on historical Japan, but maybe kids nowadays aren't really going to get it. If I made a game based on the American Revolution, I don't think many 16-year-olds would see that and think, "Oh yeah, cool!" They'd rather have something in the modern day. So that planner thought, wouldn't it be cool if we could put the story in a modern setting?

One of our

guys just jokingly said, "Hey, let's have some kind of time warp." When we got to thinking about it, *Onimusha* is game about demons; it's a fantasy world, so a time slip would work in the context of this world.

Then *Onimusha 2* came out and it didn't do so well in foreign markets. To appeal to a Western audience, we decided to make one of the major settings a foreign country, and eventually we decided on Paris. Once we had modern-day Paris as the setting, we had to connect it somehow, so we went back to the time-warp idea.

GMR: Why did you choose Paris?

KI: We were originally thinking of either New York or Paris. We wanted a contrast between ancient Japan and another city. The team thought, well, New York would be cool, here's this samurai running through New York, surrounded by skyscrapers.

But when we looked at the games that were out at the time, very few games used a European backdrop. You see New York in a lot of different games, so we wanted to take the road less traveled.

Also, *Onimusha 2* sold the worst in Europe. We felt like that's where we lost the war, so it was the key place we wanted to

EDGE

focus the third one.

GMR: What made you go with Jean Reno?

KI: It came down to this: Are we going to use New York and an American actor, or do we go with Paris and somebody who fits that atmosphere? Jean Reno is French, so he fits Paris better than an American actor would.

GMR: Is Jean Reno doing the voice acting? Why did you have him do his own motion capture?

KI: We wanted to get the way he walked, the way he moved, so that was one reason. But the main reason, and I know this is going to sound weird, but we wanted to get the actual feeling that Jean Reno was in the game.

When you're making a game, you're making something from nothing. In order to get even your own team to believe in an idea, that this fake world you're creating is real, you need the people that are playing the part to be there. Getting Reno to do the motion capture made the game all the more tangible.

We also wanted something to show the fans. Here's Jean Reno, he's actually doing the motion capture. We didn't have time to do every single step, of course, but we did many of his basic movements during the motion capture.

We didn't just want to borrow his name. We wanted him to be a part of the team, the process of making a game. This was a gesture of respect to Reno, as an actor, to invite him into the game.

Our original deal just covered the motion capture time. As we were doing it, though, he said he'd do the French voices if we needed him to. We were thrilled, and we were able to get that rolling last July.

GMR: Reno also speaks English, so will you use the French language with subtitles for the North American version, or will he also be doing English voices?

KI: We'll use the same French dialogue in both the Japanese version and the

American version.

GMR: Since it was important to have Jean Reno's presence in the game, was it less vital to have Kaneshiro's participation?

KI: Takeshi Kaneshiro is one of the things that made the first game so popular, so it's not like Reno is going to take away his importance. By putting Reno in the game, what we've done is create a balance. Americans know him, Europeans know him. And then you have Takeshi Kaneshiro, who is famous in Japan. So we've really created an international product.

GMR: What prompted the shift from 2D backgrounds to 3D?

KI: *Onimusha* was originally developed for PlayStation 1, which wasn't too great at handling a 3D background with polygon characters. So we took the system from *Resident Evil* and used it for *Onimusha*. *Onimusha 2* was developed around that time as well, before PlayStation 2 came out, using the same format as *Onimusha 1*.

Onimusha 3, by comparison, is the first game that was developed from the ground up with its own engine that was entirely designed for the PS2, not just a set of specs from Sony.

One of the problems we always faced was we never thought we could get 3D backgrounds to look as beautiful as prerendered backgrounds. But by this time we had spent enough time developing on PS2, building the engine from the ground up, that we really felt we were able to get 3D backgrounds that looked just as beautiful.

GMR: Tell us about the third playable character in *Onimusha 3*.

KI: She's a soldier named Michelle, Jacques' fiancée. Jacques disappears, so in order to try and track him down, she follows Samanosuke, who's appeared in France. Jacques' son Anil also appears in the game. Michelle tries to watch over him while searching for Jacques.

Jacques' son was actually born to

another wife who passed away, leaving Jacques to play the lone father figure. Anil still misses his mother, so he can't really accept Michelle. Over the course of the game he starts to see her as this mother figure, so I think they form one happy family in the end. I don't know, though, I haven't played all the way through to the end. [Laughs]

GMR: Are there any crossovers from the previous games?

KI: Kaede is actually dead by the time *Onimusha 3* begins, killed by the character you saw in the opening movie. If you want more information on her, that's in *Blade Warriors*. A lot of the background story is revealed in that game, especially what happens between 2 and 3.

Also, if you take data from *Onimusha 3* and plug it in when you play *Blade Warriors*, the Garaganto character is selectable, along with some other hidden characters.

GMR: Do you have plans for any future releases in the series?

KI: We planned this as a trilogy. Business is business, though, so if there are tons of fans out there, no company is going to ignore that and not want to make another game.

This phase of the *Onimusha* world is over, though. If we made a fourth game, it would be totally different. It might use the same *Onimusha* concept, but it might not have samurai. Maybe it would take place in a different time.

Producers, creators, we like to make new games, not continue with the same things over and over again. Our division has made four *Onimusha* games now, so I personally want to move on to something new.

GMR: Can you play through the game a second time with your powered-up character from a first trip through?

KI: We've heard that before from other people. We want to appease the fans any way we can, but we don't know for sure if we'll add that feature.

In *Onimusha 3*, though, there are tons of bonuses. Twice what you saw in 2. Lots of minigames, lots of extras you can get. That's what we hope people are interested in, because we spent a lot of time on them, making them very different from the main game. I hope people focus on that, not just on becoming superstrong. ■■



PS2

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

GMA COLLECTS THE 15 BEST GAMES YOU NEVER GOT TO PLAY

Every year, high-quality games are developed abroad that somehow never find a home with a U.S. publisher. That trend is rapidly decreasing these days, as North American publishers recognize the benefits of localizing and publishing a finished product without absorbing the exorbitant costs associated with long development times. Still, that doesn't help us reclaim past glories, and after much consideration, we've compiled the 15 best games that never made it to North America. Shed a tear.

01

SYSTEM: PS2 DEV: SQUARESOFT/DEAD FANTASY REL: APRIL 1997

TOBAL 2 NO FFVII DEMO NEEDED

Tobal No.1 was rightly criticized for its various

failings, although the "Final Fantasy VII demo with free bonus fighting game" gag was just a little bit unfair. It's too bad developer Dream Factory never got a chance to answer its American critics with this killer sequel, because they probably would have shut right up. Tobal 2 has better Gouraud-shaded graphics than *Dead or Alive*, a deep quest mode that destroys the weaker version in *Ehrgeiz*, a complex grappling system no 3D fighter has

equaled, and Akira Toriyama character designs without the iniquitous baggage of the *Dragon Ball Z* license.

Worst of all, Dream Factory was never the same after this game. After Tobal (and its quirky successor *Ehrgeiz*), DF's best staff members were mostly scattered to the four winds. To see what kind of difference they made, compare Tobal 2 to *Kakuto Chojin*. Too bad that game didn't stay in Japan. **B+**

FRANK FACT: AFTER THE MAJORITY OF DREAM FACTORY'S STAFF BAILED OUT, A SCABBY CHUNK FORMED AROUND THE CREATOR OF PRICE FC AND WINE RMX.



02

SYSTEM: N64 DEV: EPYTRASURE REL: NOVEMBER 2000

SIN & PUNISHMENT THE REAL PUNISHMENT IS NOT PLAYING IT

Not quite the loss to N64 that *Radiant Silvergun* was to Saturn, but a significant omission to the U.S. library nonetheless, is Treasure's lost classic *Sin & Punishment*, a darkly epic third-person shooter and possibly the coolest N64 game in existence. The story tells the tale of a near-future society in which the world is under siege by a mutated race of humans known as the ruffians. The game's protagonist is a hero by the name of Saki—a soldier fighting for the resistance Relief Group. Perhaps one of the most immediately striking elements is that the main characters are all seemingly in their mid to late teens, speak English (rather high-quality English for the cartridge format, actually), and pack major heat. This might be why Nintendo passed over this title for release in the States, but it's a shame. The graphics, unique control scheme (which makes good use of N64's bizarre controller configuration), excellent character designs, sweeping levels, and overall atmosphere make for one of the most complete game experiences around. **B+**



FRANK FACT: ALL OF SIN & PUNISHMENT'S VOICE ACTING (EVEN ON CARTRIDGE) IS IN ENGLISH, MAKING IT AN EVEN BIGGER CRIME THAT IT NEVER CAME TO THE STATES. BOO, NINTENDO, BOO!

03

SYSTEM: SATURN DEV: EPYTRASURE REL: JULY 1998

RADIANT SILVERGUN OH, THE AGONY

The greatest top-down 2D shooter ever designed in the eyes of many, *Radiant Silvergun*'s life span started in arcades on Sega's own ST-V board before an oddly timed decision on developer Treasure's part brought a limited number of copies to Sega's Saturn. The timing was strange because Treasure decided to publish the game at the end of Saturn's life cycle, a Houdini-style trick it neatly reproduced for Dreamcast one generation later (see *Karuga*). A combination of an innovative new weapons configuration (no smart bombs for you!), labyrinthine levels, an RPG-style experience system, and incredible boss battles has made this the most highly sought-after Saturn game next to *Panzer Dragon Saga*. The Saturn version added a great sense of humor, excellent cutscenes that juxtaposed 2D animation with 3D-rendered silversguns, and a bittersweet ending. A whimsical side quest to find all the merries (small, digital dogs hidden throughout the game) only makes *Silvergun* even more endearing. **B+**



FRANK FACT: "PROJECT BOY" WAS THE ORIGINAL CODE NAME FOR WHAT EVENTUALLY BECAME *RADIANT SILVERGUN* (OR *KARUGA*). IRONICALLY, THOUGH, *KARUGA* IS NOT A DIRECT SEQUEL TO *RADIANT SILVERGUN*.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

a collection of the best games that never made it to the States

WHAT U NEED

04

SYSTEM: SATURN DEV: CAMELOT REL: APRIL 1998, SEPTEMBER 1998 SHINING FORCE III PT 2 & 3 THE GREAT DISAPPEARING TAILOLOGY

If there's anything gamers hate, it's a big, fat tease. And that's exactly what Saturn owners got when Sega released the first episode of *Shining Force III* (in limited quantities, no less), but then failed to follow up with the final two chapters. Unfortunately, this had to do with bad timing more than anything else. It came at the end of the system's life cycle when Saturn was getting so trounced by PlayStation, retailers wouldn't stock Saturn software anymore, and the final two parts of *Shining Force III* got the stick (along with *Grandia*). Developed by Camelot (Hot Shots Golf, Mario Tennis, Mario Golf, Golden Sun, etc.), *Shining Force III* made the system do things graphically that it wasn't meant to do. Neat lighting effects, superfast load times, and a nifty 3D engine made the already-excellent strategy-RPG an even better experience. Sadly, the unique story, as told from the perspective of the game's three principal heroes (each who represented opposing armies), was lost to Stateside gamers. ☹



FREAK FACT: JAPANESE BUYERS OF ALL THREE PARTS OF *SHINING FORCE III* COULD SEND IN THEIR PROOF OF PURCHASES TO RECEIVE A SPECIAL FAN DISC LOADED WITH BONUS MATERIALS CALLED THE SPIRIT PREMIUM DISC.

06

SYSTEM: SATURN/PSX DEV: KONAMI REL: SEPTEMBER 1999 POLICENAUTS SNATCH THIS, KONAMI

Exactly why this famous adventure game never saw a U.S. release has never been adequately explored. Its predecessor, *Snatcher*, received a crackerjack localization for Sega CD, and *Policenauts* saw release on three consoles that were widely available in America (PSX, Saturn, and 3DO). Legend has it that Konami nearly completed an American version but then canned its publication for reasons lost to history.



In any event, it's a shame that's hammered all-the-more home by its recent rerelease for the Japanese PlayStation. You'd think an ambitious, slickly produced cinematic adventure with giant robot cops from the pen of *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima would be a ripe candidate for American release, but the mid-'90s were a strange time in the land of American games publishing.

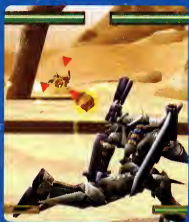
If there's any game that deserves a \$10 budget localization, though, this is it. Even some god-awful *Mobile Light Force*-quality cover art couldn't blunt the fun of finally playing *Policenauts*. ☹

FREAK FACT: *POLICENAUTS* MAY SEEM LIKE A BACKWARD GAME TECHNICALLY, BUT IT SERVED AS THE GENESIS OF THE SCRIPTING LANGUAGE USED IN THE CUTTING-EDGE *METAL GEAR* SOLO.

05

SYSTEM: DREAMCAST DEV: FROM SOFTWARE REL: JULY 1999 FRAME GRIDE WHAT THE HECK? NO MECHS?

Better known for its *Armored Core*, *Kings Field*, and (most recently) *Otoggi* games, From Software released a relatively low-profile mech-action game for Dreamcast back in 1999 that, ironically, still stands as one of its best games to date. Essentially an *Armored Core*-esque mech-combat simulator, *Frame Gride* ditches the futuristic trappings of *Core* and wraps its mechs in medieval-industrial trappings that reveal a heavy steampunk influence. *Frame Gride* is also the first From Software game to introduce A.I. escorts (in this case called squirrels) who assist you in battle. Naturally, the mechs are highly customizable, and perhaps the most compelling feature of this graphically stunning game is that gamers could compete with one another on the Internet. Ironically, From's insistence that any U.S. publisher interested in localizing the game for the States had to include the network play pretty much killed *Frame Gride*'s chances of ever coming here. ☹



FREAK FACT: NO ONE REALLY KNOWS WHAT A "FRAME GRIDE" WAS SUPPOSED TO BE. DID FROM REALLY MEAN TO CALL IT "FRAME GRIDE" OR "FRAME GLEBE"? THE WORLD MAY NEVER KNOW.

07

SYSTEM: SUPER FAMICOM DEV: SQUARE REL: SEPTEMBER 1995 SEIKEN DENSETSU 3 A TAD BUGGY, BUT OTHERWISE TO DIE FOR

Square's *Secret of Mana* was a crossover hit among game fans. Players who'd never touched a console title grew instantly addicted to its cooperative action and RPG depth. Even now, you can find PC players (and even members of the development community) who fondly remember it alone among the Super Nintendo lineup.

So, of course Nintendo never bothered to localize the sequel, even if it did have twice as many player characters, a deep character-development system, and some of Super Famicom's best graphics. Each of the six heroes can evolve into six different classes, so there's a vast selection of different party types to develop on multiple trips through the game.

Seiken 3 is one of the few games to employ Super Famicom's high-resolution mode, giving it some of the sharpest visuals on the system. Sharper, anyway, than the wits of whoever decided to leave it in Japan. ☹



FREAK FACT: *SEIKEN DENSETSU 3* WAS THE FIRST GAME TO BE HACKED INTO ENGLISH BY INTERNET FAN TRANSLATORS. NECK AND NECK WITH *FINAL FANTASY V*.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

08

SYSTEM: SATURN DEV: ATLUS REL: DECEMBER 1997

PRINCESS CROWN SPRITE TO THE CHIN

One of the best-looking 2D games ever made proved to be an unfortunate victim of the too-rapid march of technology. Around 1996, the bosses of American game publishers decided that ugly polygons were a better thing than good-looking sprites, and so games like *Princess Crown* fell right through the cracks.

There's been very little like *Princess Crown* before or since. The best description for it would be "side-scrolling action-RPG," although the balance between action and roleplay continually shifts from moment to moment. Sometimes it feels almost like an action-platform game, while at other times the combat system demands an RPG's attention to strategy.

Princess Crown's beautiful storybook style overshadows any picky questions of its genre classification, though. Its presentation at every level is thoroughly detailed and unquestionably beautiful, blending huge character sprites with multilayered backgrounds. It may represent the pinnacle of hand-drawn art in games, one that won't likely be reached again. **1+**



FREAK FACT: ON AVERAGE, *PRINCESS CROWN* COSTS \$30 LESS ON EBAY THAN IT DOES IN MOST TOKYO VIDEOGAME SHOPS. SO IT'S A LOVELY CHOICE FOR EXPATRIATE PROPRIETORS.

10

SYSTEM: NGPC DEV: SNK REL: DECEMBER 1999

FASELE!! ROBBED YET AGAIN

Fasele!! became the subject of a brief eBay feeding frenzy when its American release was abruptly cancelled by a collapsing SNK. A fully English-translated version was released in Europe (and to the U.S. press), but it missed American stores by a hair, leaving fans to scramble for all the import copies they could find.

Fasele!! is loved for its oddity as much as its quality. There are very few games like it on handhelds—it's a mecha-strategy sim halfway between *Front Mission* and *Carnage Heart*, with the former's strong story presentation and the latter's clever mecha-programming gameplay. It's not as hands-off as some related robot sims, but there's an interesting element of anticipation to its strategy.

Fasele!! was also one of NGPC's most technically accomplished games. It had some of the handheld's best graphics and music, which unfortunately missed the notice of most American gamers. **1+**

FREAK FACT: *FASELE!!* WAS DEVELOPED BY THE EX-SQUARE TALENTS AT SAKNOB, AND IT'S ARGUABLY THEIR BEST GAME, UNLESS YOU REALLY LIKED KUGELBECK OR SHADOW HEARTS.



09

SYSTEM: PC-ENGINE DEV: KONAMI REL: OCTOBER 1993

DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD BRING ME THE HEAD OF TURBO TECHNOLOGIES

We can't blame Konami for missing *Dracula X*, but we can blame NEC. Its American arm did everything wrong with the TurboGrafx-16, making a successful console in Japan an ignored laughingstock in the United States.

Therefore, nobody bought Turbo or its Turbo Duo successor, leaving no U.S. market for the premier expression of Castlevania as a side-scrolling action game. *Rondo of Blood* is the total package: superb graphics, beautiful CD sound, and fiendish level and boss designs. In an era crowded with 2D platformers, its cleverly patterned challenges were a cut above, and the developers knew it. They even included a gallery of "perfect" boss strategies to show off how smart they were....

As smart as fans who jumped on copies and never let them go, even as its value soared past \$100, *Dracula X* is unfindable at a reasonable price, but whip-cracking fans should catch it if they can. **1+**

FREAK FACT: *RONDO OF BLOOD* KICKED OFF THE TRADITION OF NAMING CASTLEVANIA GAMES AFTER CLASSICAL MUSIC PIECES. FOLLOWING *RONDO* ARE NOCTURNE, CONCERTO, AND MINUET.



11

SYSTEM: MSG DEV: KONAMI REL: JULY 1990

METAL GEAR 2: SOLID SNAKE THE REAL SOLID SNAKE

To be fair, Americans could never have realistically played this. MSX wasn't available in the United States, and the game was never ported elsewhere. Meanwhile, Konami had American fans in mind with *Metal Gear Solid*, offering plenty of background detail to explain the parts of *MG2* that lead into *MGS*.

But we are fanatics, and we want our *Metal Gear*. Particularly when it smokes the fake American sequel like the cheapest of El Presidente cigars. *Solid Snake* added smarter A.I. for the bad guys and more evasion techniques for its hero—primitive stuff by modern standards, but a huge step ahead in 1990—and it featured plotting and character development to belie its 16-bit graphics.

There are ways and means to play *Solid Snake*, and it's worth the effort. You probably can't experience it in advance of *Metal Gear Solid* for the full effect, but such is the occasional price of being American. **1+**

FREAK FACT: *METAL GEAR 2* FEATURED THE FIRST CLEAN CHARACTER PORTRAITS IN THE SERIES AND DEPICTED THE ARMO AND BOSS AS A DEAD RINGER FOR ACTOR SEAN CONNERY.



THAT WAS
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12 SAKURA TAISEN FANBOYS DIG THAT BIG-EYE S***

SYSTEM: SATURN/DC DEV: SEGA REL: 1996-2003

Red Entertainment and Overworks generated waves of geek love with this animation-inspired blend of mecha strategy and relationship simulation. Sega of America generated waves of geek hatred by variously describing the *Sakura Taisen* series as too rich, too Japanese, too hard to localize, or all of the above.

Sakura's character designs provide the hook for Japanophilic fans, but there's a deep game behind the charming cartoon chicks. In particular, Overworks built an excellent battle system for the later Dreamcast installments. And while opinions may be mixed on the relative taste of Sakura's dating-sim elements (macking the mech pilots leads to effective cooperation in combat), it's hard not to love the 20s-vintage steam-powered robots.

The recent PS2 *Sakura* remake, combining Saturn characters and Dreamcast gameplay, was a perfect candidate for U.S. release. It could have introduced the series to American fans in anticipation of future releases, but Sega again said no. **B+**



FRANK FACT: SEGA NOW RUNS ITS OWN SAKURA TAISEN CAFE IN TOKYO—SAKURA THEMED DÉCOR, SAKURA-THEMED CUTEY DESSERTS, AND SAKURA-THEMED HOUSEWARES FOR SALE.

13 CARD FIGHTER'S CLASH 2 MORE OF A VERY GOOD THING

SYSTEM: NGPC DEV: SNK REL: OCTOBER 1999

It's possible to criticize *Card Fighter's Clash 2* as an expansion rather than an sequel, but only if you've never played it. The addition of 124 cards (bringing the total to more than 400), plus new card types, interface, and artwork, made a fun and quirky experience even better.

Card Fighter's Clash is good enough in its own right to be fun for casual fans of either company's mythos, although it is certainly more fun for rabid followers of the characters. The sequel makes things a little more complex with the addition of more backup alliances and special Reaction cards, but it retains the quick and relatively simple character of the original, keeping the action fast and fun.

CF2C never made it to Europe, so the *Faseil* route is closed to American gamers. It's easy to track down and simple enough to appreciate in Japanese, but the full experience remains denied. **B+**



FRANK FACT: BESIDES THE GAME THAT BEARS HIS NAME, *CF2C* FEATURES THE ONLY KNOWN APPEARANCE OF GANT ROBOT HERO CHOUJUROU KINOSHITA.

14 VIB-RIBBON THE BEST BLACK-AND-WHITE GAME EVER

SYSTEM: PSX DEV: SCE REL: DECEMBER 1999

Vib-Ribbon is difficult to describe in useful terms. Like its brother *PaRappa the Rapper* or its cousin *Rez*, it's a dead-simple gameplay experience, but that simplicity is key to its aesthetic success. If you had to think too much in this game, it wouldn't be nearly as good. At a basic level, *Vib-Ribbon* is just a Simon-says button-tapping challenge. But it prefigures *Rez* in the way its graphics and sound continually influence and are influenced by the user's inputs. It generates challenges dynamically according to the music it's fed, and your inputs affect the way it presents the music, altering the tempo and adding effects.



These are cold terms to describe a game starring a dancing vector-graphics rabbit king, but it's hard to walk a middle path with *Vib-Ribbon*. It lends itself to either cold analysis or raving gibberish. Japanese copies can be had for a pittance (likewise the PAL version, which is in English), though, so play it and understand. **B+**

These are cold terms to describe a game starring a dancing vector-graphics rabbit king, but it's hard to walk a middle path with *Vib-Ribbon*. It lends itself to either cold analysis or raving gibberish. Japanese copies can be had for a pittance (likewise the PAL version, which is in English), though, so play it and understand. **B+**

FRANK FACT: *REZ* MIMICKED ITS CHARACTER "EVOLUTION" SYSTEM FROM *VIB-RIBBON*, WHOSE PINWHEEL CHARACTER WASN'T BLOOD, BUT RATHER A CARTOON ROBOT IN A CROWN AND CAPE.

15 FRONT MISSION 2 ALL POLLED UP WITH NOWHERE TO GO

SYSTEM: PS DEV: SQUARE REL: SEPTEMBER 1997

Strategy games are making a comeback these days, what with *Final Fantasy Tactics* *Advance* and *Advance Wars 2* selling by the truckload, but back in the late '90s, the genre wasn't as eagerly embraced. That's a bad thing, because we never got the original SNES *Front Mission* (tragic, considering the import was mostly in English) or its supertative sequel, *Front Mission 2*, which remains the best-looking version in the series (*FM3* sacrificed fancy graphics for faster loading times), takes place in 22nd century Bangladesh during a tumultuous period in Southeast Asia. It's wanzan (*Front Mission*'s name for mechs) versus wanzan, and the enormous game is an overload of customizable mechs and tactically challenging objectives on war-torn urban battlefields. The game, taken in parts, is gorgeous with beautifully rendered mechs, great special effects, and fantastic hand-drawn character art. The thing that practically neutralizes the experience, though, is some of the most criminal load times known to man. Since Square Enix ported the first *Front Mission* to PS1 (in Japan, alas) and is working on *Front Mission 4*, perhaps an *FM2* revamp is in the cards. **B+**



FRANK FACT: *FRONT MISSION 2* WAS THE SEQUEL TO THE ORIGINAL GAME, BUT THE THIRD IN THE SERIES. *FRONT MISSION: DUN HAZARD* (S/PANCODE), A 2D SIDE-SCROLLING SHOOTER, CAME OUT A YEAR EARLIER.



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Here at GMR, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about the game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game in progress is looking. It's a snapshot. If we're not very excited by it, the game gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

METAL GEAR SOLID: TWIN SNAKES	GC	067
EA SPORTS FIGHT NIGHT	XB/PS2	069
ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS	PS2	069
SIREN	PS2	069
METAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	PC	070
BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM	PC	070
JAMES BOND: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	PS2/GC/XB	070
RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK	PS2	071
STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT	XB	072
NIGHTSHADE	PS2	073
SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX	PS2	073
UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING	XB	073
PHANTASY STAR ONLINE: EPISODE III	GC	074
HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE	GC	076
TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS	XB	076
PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION	PS2/XB/GC	076
SAMURAI WARRIORS	PS2	077
LIFELINE	PS2	078
MVP BASEBALL 2004	PS2/XB/GC/PC	079
ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005	PS2/XB	079
MLB SLUGFEST: LOADED	PS2/XB	079
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2005	PS2	079
ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K4	PS2/XB/GC	079

RELEASE | MARCH

METAL GEAR SOLID: TWIN SNAKES

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

SYSTEM GC PUBLISHER KONAMI DEVELOPER SILICON KNIIGHTS/MGS2



➔ Everyone should know the story by now. Shadow Moses, a seemingly nondescript disposal facility hidden from the world, deep in the Alaskan wilderness, has been captured by a terrorist organization known as FoxHound. Their apparent goal: to activate the mobile battle tank known as Metal Gear, an ultraclassified military project capable of delivering a substantial nuclear payload on very short notice. While Washington engages FoxHound's leaders in the usual

bureaucratic mind games, a lone soldier sneaks in the back door. He's got 18 hours to undermine the terrorists, lest every lunatic with a trust fund get his hands on his very own Metal Gear.

This is the story of Solid Snake. How he came to be reincarnated nearly six years after the events at Shadow Moses in *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* is another story, which ought to be familiar by now. Shigeru Miyamoto and Hideo Kojima had a common vision—MGS on GameCube—but since Kojima's

development team was so firmly entrenched in PS2 development, *Metal Gear Solid 3* in particular, they didn't have the ability (or time) to work on Nintendo's console. Enter Silicon Knights, a studio well-learned in GameCube development, thanks to *Eternal Darkness*. By working closely with Konami Tokyo and heeding the advice of both Miyamoto and Kojima, Silicon Knights is clearly taking its charge seriously: The game has already missed the crucial holiday season due to a necessary delay.

But now, the release date is drawing ever closer, and we're still trying to figure out the best way to play and appreciate *Twin Snakes*. Is it worth it to go back and play through the original *Metal Gear Solid* in order to catch every little detail that's been changed? Or is it better to hold off and play through *Twin Snakes* first so that the experience feels wintergreen fresh? We'll leave it to you to decide the best course of action... ■

GMA SAYS ➔ It's so close that we're starting to get the shakes. Where's our Clazepam?

➔ HOW HOT...



HIDE THE SNAKES

➔ Mr. Kojima himself describes *Twin Snakes* as a "new hybrid MGS." What does that mean, exactly? Well, putting aside the obvious graphical upgrades (if you haven't seen the original MGS lately, pop it into your PS2 and then take a look at these new *Twin Snakes* screens for comparison—yeah, thought so), Solid Snake is magically blessed with the same abilities he was granted during *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. Is that guard up on the walkway giving you grief? No problem, just dangle off the ledge and wait for him to pass. Want to take the pacifist route? Then just load up your tranquilizer gun, switch into first-person aiming, and let him have it. He'll wake up a few hours later in a locker, undoubtedly reevaluating his career path. Oh, and just to keep things fair, the guards get their MGS2 upgrades, too. Throw in brand-new cut-scenes and totally rerecorded voice acting, and it's clear that this is not your father's *Metal Gear Solid*. 11



➔ Remember this scene? Solid Snake follows a trail of blood and recently slashed Genome soldiers to the lab, where he first encounters the mysterious—and highly badass—Ninja. *Twin Snakes*' new first-person view gets us closer to the thrilling encounter. Suddenly, that katana blade he's swinging around seems a little more dangerous...



RELEASE | SPRING

EA SPORTS FIGHT NIGHT

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY

DEV/STN PS2/XB DEVELOPER EA SPORTS DEVELOPER EA SPORTS

Professional boxing has never really been done justice in the videogame world. Sure, the *Knockout Kings* games were good, but compared with what? Like most boxing games, it just devolved into button-mashing and dodging and lacked any of the true nuance of the sport. EA Sports rights that wrong with its new pugilism sim, *Fight Night*, which puts the control back in your taped and gloved hands.

Fight Night's innovation rests in its control scheme, which aims to give your boxer more complex movement through a more intuitive interface. Instead of controlling different punch types with different buttons, the right analog stick controls your swings. Move the stick to the left and hook around to the front,

and you'll throw a...wait for it...left hook. Then down and up around the right side, right uppercut, and so on. It's very intuitive, as are the defensive controls, which involve the same movements plus some shoulder-button action.

Of course because it's EA Sports, the classic pro boxers already licensed for *Knockout Kings*—including Ali, Rocky Marciano, and Roy Jones Jr.—appear in this game. A progressive career mode, some awesome graphics, and rag-doll physics applied to knockouts that will make you weak in the knees all add up to what may be the boxing game we've been waiting for our whole lives. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Hit me with your best shot, EA.

→ HOW HOT... ●●●●

RELEASE | MARCH

ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS

OF SILK AND STEEL

DEV/STN PS2 DEVELOPER CAPCOM DEVELOPER CAPCOM

Ah, the feeling of the wind in your hair—typically a liberating sensation for sure, except when the wind is caused by a passing blade and the only thing that's been liberated is your head from your shoulders. That's the fate of many an antagonist in Capcom's upcoming multiplayer slashfest, *Onimusha Blade Warriors*.

Compiling more than a dozen combatants from the first two *Onimusha* games and an additional 12 unlockable characters, *Blade Warriors* offers some snappy fighting-game action in the vein of Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros.* Melee. Characters move in and out of the foreground by double-tapping up or down, which creates additional evasive options for up to four players.

Power-ups are scattered all over the environments, stashed in treasure boxes on every stage. Successful use of these items will help recover your health, inflict elemental damage on your enemies, and offer myriad other useful benefits.

In grand *Onimusha* tradition, souls are absorbed through ogreish gauntlets [they're all the rage, everybody has one], allowing you to upgrade both weapons and armor. *Blade Warriors* is a looker, ripe with fan service (ahem, Mega Man) and good mindless fun. **B+**

GMA SAYS → It's fun, but merely an appetizer to the melody of *Onimusha 3: Wrath of the*→ HOW HOT... ●●●●

SIREN

DEV/STN PS2 DEVELOPER SCEA DEVELOPER DEEP SPACE

From a combination of the twisted minds that brought you the first *Siren*: *hill and Extermination* comes a new horror game. *Siren* weaves an intricate tale of multiple characters who find themselves drawn to one seemingly deserted town. Each character has the ability to "sight/jack" other characters and monsters in order to see what they see. You get one guess as to how puzzles are solved.

RELEASE | SPRING



RELEASE | TBD

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

THE SUN ALSO SETS

DEVELOPER: PC PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: S&P

➔ **The Medal of Honor team recently lost a battle—but hopefully not the whole war.**

EA swears on a stack of bibles that the upcoming *Pacific Assault* is absolutely nothing like the console version. That is, except for the tense (and Ben Affleck-free) Pearl Harbor sequence that will be on PC.

EA promises a single-player campaign with a distinct flavor and A.I. that won't make you feel like you're in a totally scripted sequence. Take sneaking through the foliage versus going in guns ablaze—the latter alerts nearby troops and makes your passage through Guadalcanal a whole lot tougher. In short, there will be consequences to how you play.

The real big difference from the

console is obviously going to be the multiplayer matches. Here, modeled on the *Medal of Honor: Breakthrough* expansion, it's being crafted to play more like a single-player experience. The spawn points are a series of objectives that give your side the advantage. For example, if you hold the wharf long enough, a vehicle shows. It's all about the choices you'll be making on the battlefield, whether it's the class you play as or which checkpoints to hold first. More important, EA looks like it's making the right choices for the next *Medal of Honor*. ☺

GMA SAYS → Make the right choice and jock up *Pacific Assault*

→ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥



RELEASE | SPRING

BATTLEFIELD: VIETNAM

FRAG METAL JACKET

DEVELOPER: PC PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DICE

➔ **As much as we've enjoyed beating back Nazis, it gets old. So EA Games is bringing its cracklike Battlefield experience to Nam, and recent intel indicates that the new battleground looks to do justice to both.**

For starters, vehicles factor differently into gameplay. Sure, you've got tanks and jeeps, but the real workhorses of this war are helicopters and PBR patrol boats. Hell, you'll even see napalm drops (although apparently, the plant life is treated with asbestos—it never burns down). In a few test maps we played recently, we even toiled around on some rusty Vespas lying in the jungles.

But vehicles can't hit what they

can't see. Go behind some foliage, and your character is pretty much invisible. There aren't any colored name tags identifying you to nearby enemies, so you can sit and lurk until the opportune moment. This will be deadly in the right camper's hands.

The audio also plays into the overall experience—beyond adding that immersive "like you're there" effect. A Huey rolls in over the tree line, and you hear the gunship blasting "Fortunate Son." U.S. troops know that help is on the way, and the Viet Cong know to head for the hills. ☺

GMA SAYS → War is normally hell, but in this case, hell yeah, we're going!

→ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥



JAMES BOND: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

DEVELOPER: PC PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA

Not satisfied with just slapping photo-realistic skins of the stars onto modes in a tired old shooter, *Everything or Nothing* gives gamers the opportunity to do a little bit of everything Bond does: driving fast cars, flying aircraft, and snuffing henchmen. There's some really cool, repeating stuff, too. No word on a movie-shaking simulator, however.

RELEASE | FEBRUARY

→ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

RELEASE | MARCH

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK

TUE FALLEN. AND I CAN'T GET UP...CUZ ZOMBIES ARE EATING MY FAICKIN' FACE!

□ SYSTEM PS2 □ PUBLISHER CAPCOM □ DEVELOPER CAPCOM



→ No man is a blowgun-equipped island fortress in the world of *Resident Evil Outbreak*. You'll rely on your allies for firepower support, extra item inventory, and even carrying your crippled self when you've taken too much damage. Miss Manners says a simple thank-you card is appropriate.



➔ Here's something you probably didn't know about *Resident Evil Outbreak*, the online extension of Capcom's zombie-centric horror series: Originally, it wasn't an online game. Capcom first planned to extend and improve the teamwork aspects of *Resident Evil 0*, and online play was added only when it became clear that it would work well on a network.

So it's not surprising that *Outbreak's* offline game is as extensive as its online play. Each character has different story sequences, which provide around 15

hours of playtime. Fortunately, that's not the only thing distinguishing the characters—each one will encounter different problems and possible solutions, as well as run into numerous random events.

The collectibles provide another incentive to play in the offline mode. You can find more than 260 special items if you look hard enough, and they can affect the gameplay. Collecting all the fireman badges in the burning building will result in a different ending for that chapter, but carting them around will

consume space in your inventory. Additionally, you can unlock 20 NPC models to control (including some that the development team characterizes as "very fun and very interesting"), plus cut-scenes, movies, and songs to replay. All these goodies alone mean you could be playing *Outbreak* for many days (or if you're very brave, nights) to come.

But then, of course, you can also carry them over to the online mode, in which there's also an exhaustively detailed ranking system. You can compare potential teammates by how

many enemies they engage, how often they use a particular weapon, and even how many doors they tend to open. For obsessive types who want to plot a better strategy, there's an equally detailed postmatch timeline that shows each player's every action.

Outbreak will be out on PS2, banging down doors and moaning in your home, sometime in March. ☹

GMA SAYS → It's hair-raising gameplay to be shared, but it's so much more.

→ HOW HOT...



PS2

RELEASE | MARCH

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT

BRINGING THE CONFLICT RIGHT TO YOUR DOORSTEP

Console: XB Developer: CAPCOM Developer: CAPCOM



← Steel Battalion requires major-league skills, as controlling a VT is not dissimilar to driving an 18-wheeler. This isn't your daddy's flight sim, nor is it a pick-up-and-play type of game. Controlling your VT is one thing, controlling it well is another. Do you have what it takes to join the Panzer Division's elite forces? Take your smack talk online.

➔ If *Steel Battalion* achieved nothing else upon its release in late 2002, it brought the extravagance of an arcade-quality experience into the homes of Xbox owners everywhere...or at least those who could stomach the relatively nominal \$200 investment required to experience it.

Those two Benjamins bought you more than an intimidatingly deep heavy-metal mech experience, though. They also bought you a massive 40-button controller filled, literally, with

all the bells and whistles you would expect to find in the cockpit of a superpowered megaton war machine called a VT (vertical tank). As deep as any realistic sim you'll likely encounter on console or PC, *Steel Battalion* puts you on the front line of a major conflict as a member of the elite Panzer Division.

Steel Battalion: Line of Contact is set to deliver on the potential of this ambitious concept by implementing Xbox Live support, allowing teams of five players to compete against each

other. And while *Line of Contact* might not feature an MMORPG's perpetual environment, players have a reason to be successful—warring factions can gain or lose ground during battle. With highly customizable VTs, teams will want to make the best use of each member's strengths and equipment. Players can also acquire new mechs by seizing enemy VTs and finding rare mechs hidden in the game.

For those of you who couldn't reserve a copy of the original *Steel Battalion*, there's some good news:

Capcom will produce another run of the game/controller set. The bad news is that in order to play *Line of Contact* (which ships sans controller), you'll have to buy the original set to get the mandatory 40-button behemoth. The price of admission seems steep, but for the most exotic thrill you'll likely get on a console, there's nothing else like *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact*. **B+**

GMA SAYS → *Line of Contact* makes Mech Assault look like clown shoes. Yeah, we said it.

➔ HOW HOT...



INCOMING GAMES

nightshade → seven samurai 20xx → unreal ii: the awakening



NIGHTSHADE FUNKED-UP NINJAS KICK IT

Developer PS2 Developer SEGA Developer WOW WORKS

➔ The big thing in action games these days is playing with time: *Max Payne* does it, *Prince of Persia* does it, even *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* does it.

One of the more successful time experiments is 2002's *Shinobi* on PS2, which has Hotsuma string together kills "between moments" to pull off impressively bloody death scenes at the end of a successful combo. Now *Wow Works* is back with another—excuse the pun—stab at the idea with the semisequel *Nightshade*.

The same basic elements are in place: You still play as a ninja, but now you're hottie Hibana instead of badass Hotsuma, and you still rely mainly on your sword for slicing. You now have an alternate main weapon, in addition to your shuriken and ninja magic, but the killing parts are pretty much exactly as they were in *Shinobi*.

What's changed is the level design—in particular, the way it plays to the game's strengths. Whereas *Shinobi* relied too much on straightforward (and boring) hallways, *Nightshade* includes funkier stages, some of which have you teetering on the back of a stealth plane, speeding through the city, or spending an entire level running across the sides of a moving train. In addition, there's more aerial combat and vertical levels, so you're not simply running back and forth on the ground.

We'll see if *Wow Works* can bring the whole package together for the game's PS2 release this March. We'd tell you to look out for it, but the whole point of being a ninja is that people never know you're there. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Just right to the stab in the arm *Shinobi* needs.

→ HOW HOT... ☆☆☆

XB

RELEASE | MARCH

SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX IN A.D. 20XX, WAR WAS BEGINNING

Developer PS2 Developer SAMMY STUDIOS Developer DAPS

➔ Suppose you were assigned the task of converting legendary director Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* into a videogame. How would you approach adapting this solemn Japanese period drama? If your answer is "create a hyperkinetic, futuristic robot-killing hack-n-slash," congratulations! There's a place for you at Sammy.

Seven Samurai 20XX tells the story of seven warriors united to protect a peaceful village from marauders. A big guy, a two-handed swordsman, a drunkard—the characters will be familiar to fans of the movie.

That's about where the similarities to the source material end, though. Kurosawa's film is a black-and-white treatise on honor and morality; the game is a neon-bued exercise

in killing everything in sight. Think *Dynasty Warriors* with less strategy and more robots. The action boils down to knowing the proper move for a given situation and taking down the baddies as quickly as possible, and Sammy promises a multitude of unlockable weapons and extras to serve as incentive to spend time with this one-player brawler.

It's a strange interpretation, but not unprecedented: *Star Wars* is basically Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* set in space. Still, while *Seven Samurai 20XX* won't appeal to purists, it could satisfy gamers who prefer their cinematic adaptations lit on gravitas and heavy on mayhem. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Is perfect way to kill b're to you wait for the Capcom *Kame* fighting game.

→ HOW HOT... ☆☆☆



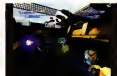
PS2

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

Developer XB Developer ATARI Developer TANTALUS

While the PC game looked nice and had a few inventive weapons, it was damn short and lacked multiplayer. Problem solved: This version allows Xbox users to get a taste of frenetic class-based warfare action (like in Wolfenstein: Tales of War)—even giving you vehicles to control. These levels have recently been incorporated into the PC version, so check 'em out if you want a taste of what's to come.

RELEASE | MARCH



→ HOW HOT... ☆☆☆

RELEASE | FEBRUARY

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EPISODE III

YOU WANT A REVOLUTION? HERE YOU GO...

DIRECTOR GC DEVELOPER SEGA CODEVELOPER SONIC TEAM



← Yeah, it looks darn similar to *PSO Episode I & II*, doesn't it? And yet kind of strange as well. That's because you're not moving around in real time any more. Instead, you use your loaded deck to attack and counterattack enemy moves. Using the right card (or cards) in the right situation can save your hide. Sense an incoming attack? Set up a mag card to absorb the brunt of the damage.

➔ **PSO Episode III: C.A.R.D.**
Revolution is not Phantasy Star Online. Not as you know it, anyway. It looks like *PSO*, it has *PSO* monsters and characters, and it says *PSO* on the box, but if you're looking for something that plays even remotely like past *PSO* games, you're not going to find it here.

This could be good or bad, depending on whether you enjoy Sega's series. If *PSO* left you wishing for a little more strategic depth, *Episode III* has plenty—it's half tactical combat, half collectible card game.

It takes place 20 years after a meteor crashed on the surface of Ragol, and all is not well aboard the *Pioneer 2* spacecraft. A generation raised in space has its own ideas about colonization, and rising tensions have given way to open rebellion. The game begins as the Principal Government's Hunters are finding more of their missions disrupted by the attacks of the mysterious Arkz.

The backstory creates two campaigns, two stories, and two gameplay styles. In the Hero campaign, you command a team of Hunters,

powering them up with equipment cards and taking advantage of their individual class abilities. In the Darkside campaign, you command the Arkz rebellion, fighting with unique heroes and teams of summoned monsters. Choosing a campaign does more than just change how the story unfolds—Hero missions demand a strategy completely different from what you'd use in the Darkside campaign.

Turn-based battles follow the same basic flow on either side. You roll dice for pools of attack and defense points,

which are used to move characters and play cards during movement and action phases, and then you finish each turn by tossing unnecessary cards and drawing up to a hand of five. Everything else changes depending on which side you play as. Building a Darkside deck means sorting through the bestiary of creatures and picking monsters that best complement their summoner. Hero decks, meanwhile, are built around equipment (weapons, mags, armor, and shields) and action cards that give the team an edge in combat.



→ All your favorite enemies are back for a beatin', but now you don't have to worry about garbage camera angles messing up the works. Since everything is viewed from fixed (but dynamic) perspectives, the camera is never a problem. Plus, the story is revealed through comic-book-style cut-scenes.



Kranz
Ok. Thanks for your help



This is a massive adjustment for players used to *PSO*'s simple combat system. Even the online experience is fundamentally changed, offering 2-on-2 card battles instead of cooperative combat against the computer. Online actually isn't the primary mode in *Episode II*—now it's a multiplayer bonus on top of the single-player adventure.

Some constants remain, though—for instance, there's a certain kinship between *PSO*'s cycle of loot collection and the card gamer's eternal quest to gather just one more ultrarare card.

PSO's art direction, of course, remains awesome, a solid engine backed up by beautiful artwork from Sonic Team.

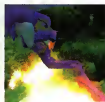
Looks can be deceiving, though. Gameplaywise, this is for fans of *Cutcept*, *Magic: The Gathering*, and *Gladius*, while *PSO* followers could be in for a rude awakening. But hey, they could just as easily get hooked on a completely different style of online action. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Not just more of the same.

→ HOW HOT...

THE SAGA CONCLUDES

→ Sega created a classy send-off for *PSO* fans with a special release in Japan. Completists can pick up a box set of *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II* for GameCube, upgraded with every special downloadable and bonus quest, and a special Trilogy Box to hold *Episode I & II* and the newly released *Episode III*. Unfortunately, Americans are missing out on this one—not just the collectible extras, but the bonus GameCube quests as well.



PS
PC
PS2
GC



RELEASE | MARCH

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

MILK THE COW. THIS TIME WITH FEELING

SYSTEM: GC DEVELOPER: NATSUME CODEVELOPER: HARVELOS INTERACTIVE

➔ After spending a day at the rat race, how about heading to the country? *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* is a great way to restore peace to your soul, transporting you to bucolic Forget-Me-Not Valley.

Despite its pastoral setting, though, *Wonderful Life* is not all kicking back. Not only do you have to manage your farm, from buying seeds to selling crops to caring for your animals, but you've also got to maintain your social life. There are three ladies to court and spawn with, and since the game spans 30 virtual years, you better choose wisely.

Natsume wisely listened to fan feedback and incorporated all the best parts from previous iterations of the

series—and made this the most detailed, expansive *Harvest Moon* yet. The array of choices is dizzying, from different types of cows and grades of milk quality to the ability to breed hybrid vegetables. Watermelon-tomatoes, anyone? Not only are there new animals and seed types, but there are 40 new characters. You can even link up with the GBA game *Friends of Mineral Town* and get gossip from the other town.

Thankfully, despite all the new stuff, the hypercuteness remains intact. Moo-velous. (Sorry.) **B+**

GMA SAYS → Should be the best farm-based game of the year! Oh, and the best *Harvest Moon* ever.

➔ HOW HOT... **B+**



RELEASE | MARCH

TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

A RETURN WORTH WAITING FOR

SYSTEM: XB DEVELOPER: ACTIVISION CODEVELOPER: K2 LLC

➔ Call it a director's cut. Call it the game it should've been in the first place. But whatever you call it, you won't call it not worth the wait.

Tenchu: Return From Darkness for Xbox is an enhanced edition of *Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven*—the stealth-action game that arrived on PS2 early last year. How much is it improved? How much time do you have? This version of the sneak-n-slasher has better graphics, two additional single-player maps, smarter enemies (guards now blow whistles to call on reinforcements if you get spotted), more ninja abilities (a camouflage skill and sidestep-then-attack move), a new special

item (a potion that lowers your health but raises your strength), an extra boss fight, added cut-scenes that better fill out the story, bonus soundtrack scores, and last but not least, a dual ninja co-op mode for play over Xbox Live. (An online version mode may be included if development time permits.)

With such a bevy of new features and augmentations, *Return From Darkness* should make Xbox owners the envy of the videogame ninja-wannabe set this March. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Every developer who's done a lazy-ass port will be shamed.

➔ HOW HOT... **B+**



PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION

SYSTEM: PS2/XB/GC DEVELOPER: ACTIVISION CODEVELOPER: EDGE OF REALITY

Maybe they should've called this game *Lessure Suit Harry*, since we witnessed this shaming expedition tensely tinted with danger and the shapely moves. The big draw is the right thumb stick, which is being used in an enormous new way: Need to drink water? You must lower the canteen and then lift to drink. Are noxious fumes choking you down? Hold the gas mask to your head. Just don't ask why Harry wouldn't strap the damn thing to his noggin—or what that snail is

RELEASE | MARCH

➔ HOW HOT... **B+**

RELEASE | MARCH

SAMURAI WARRIORS KOEI'S NEW DYNASTY

PlayStation PS2 Dreamcast XBOX Gamecube KOEI JAPAN

Koei has carved out its own little dynasty with its *Dynasty Warriors* series, the venerable 3D-action bash-em-ups (*DW4: Xtreme Legends* came out this past fall). While not ready to kill the goose just yet, Koei is wisely taking the series in a new direction with *Samurai Warriors*, which looks and feels every bit a progeny of the *DW* legacy, but with some interesting twists.

Samurai Warriors moves the *DW* game setting from China to feudal Japan during the bloody Sengoku, or warring states, period of the 15th through early 17th centuries. You play various warlords, samurai, and ninja and kick major ketsu in historical and fictional conflicts, like the fabled Okehazama

battle, and within the castles of Azuchi and Odawara.

While *DW* has always focused on kingdoms, *Samurai Warriors* focuses on characters. Each character has its own scenarios and missions, letting you make choices and play out alternate outcomes. There are over 500 of these sorts of minimeissions.

Samurai Warriors also includes a slick character-edit mode that lets you create your own samurai (or any other kind of warrior). Of course, if you build Tom Cruise, the *GMR* posse will hunt you down. J-pop fans should listen for the theme song by BoA. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Brings new life to a legendary series.

→ **HOW HOT** ... ★★★★★



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RELEASE | MARCH

LIFELINE

YOU FINALLY HAVE A REASON TO STOP TALKING TO YOURSELF

Platform: PS2 Publisher: KONAMI Developer: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN



→ "Hey bee-atch, go get me a beer!" OK, maybe that's asking a bit much of Lifeline's voice-central system, but Konami claims there are 100,000 command phrases that will work—plus 5,000 words of English. It's like a modern-day test adventure for those of us with lazy-ass fingers. But, really, be nice, virtual heroines have feelings, too, you know.



← Lifeline takes place in a futuristic space-station hotel. Unfortunately, an attack by terrifying, deadly creatures will prevent you from fully enjoying your swank environs. It's always something, isn't it?

PS2



→ You couldn't tell by looking at it, but *Lifeline's* creator got the idea for the game while watching Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*. When you're watching a movie, explains Manabu Nishizawa, you want to get involved in the action. "I wanted to help him," he says, "I wanted to tell him there was an enemy right behind him." Which you can't do in the movies, of course, but the PS2's voice-recognition headset makes it more than possible.

Lifeline looks like a survival-horror game in the *Resident Evil* mold, but it

plays more like an old Sierra or LucasArts graphic adventure. The difference is, instead of futz with a text interface or poking around for point-and-click hot spots, *Lifeline's* interface is completely spoken. You play the role of an operator heroine (hence the Japanese title, *Operator's Side*) directing the game's heroine, the survivor of a disaster aboard a newly opened space station.

Yes, heroine, voiced by Kristen Miller of television's *She Spies*. Her name is Rio, and she's a lot easier on

the eyes than a beat-up John McClane. Controlling her is as simple as saying "walk down the hall," "open the door," "search that bookcase," or "shoot the alien slime monster before it eats you." *Lifeline's* parser, based on voice-recognition technology from ScanSoft, can handle more than 5,000 words of English and more than 100,000 command phrases, so it's not often that you stomp it with an unknown command. Even combat runs solely on voice controls. It's like *Parasite Eve*—partially real-time, with free movement

around a 3D battle/eld—but you tell Rio when to shoot, dodge, and reload.

The shootouts may seem familiar, just like the old-school adventure gameplay, but the "look, ma, no controller!" effect makes conventional challenges something new and different. The chance to chat with a cute girl without watching her flee in terror afterward is just icing on the cake. B+

GMA SAYS → Gimmicky, but we do kinda miss adventure games.

→ HOW HOT ...



INCOMING GAMES

mvp baseball 2004 → mls slugfest: loaded → all-star baseball 2005 → major league baseball 2005 → espn major league baseball 2k4

» NEXT

BASEBALL ROUNDUP

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR WHEN WE TRY TO COME UP WITH NEW BALL JOKES

Check out this year's starting lineup. The roster has gone through several trades and acquisitions, namely Microsoft's buyout of bankrupted 3DO's stat-strong *High Heat Baseball*. Combined with Microsoft's own weaker *Inside Pitch*, the two will be in spring training together. So unfortunately, no Microsoft entry this year. Batter up, y'all!

RELEASE | MARCH

MVP BASEBALL 2004 TRIPLE PLAY DOUBLY FORGOTTEN

Developer: PS2/XBOX/PC Publisher: EA SPORTS Developer: EA SPORTS

➔ Now that the Triple Play series is as forgotten as the baseball strike of '94, EA Sports' MVP Baseball continues to mop up with a sweetly honed pitching system and the newly implemented Freestyle control—the latter akin to Madden's Playmaker or NBA Live's Freestyle second-duel-stick controls. PS2 and PC players can play and talk smack online, too. **B+**



GMA SAYS → We're talking a potential Median of the baseball world here.

➔ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | JUNE

MLB SLUGFEST: LOADED STRATEGY-INJECTED ACADENESS

Developer: PS2/XB Publisher: MIDWAY Developer: MIDWAY

➔ Midway's SlugFest has gone the way of its subtitle, loading up for another round of action-style baseball with the right strong-armed twists of strategy. There are even more wild and crazy moves and plenty of comedic commentary by Jim Shorts and Tim Kitzrow. At the same time, there's a deep franchise mode, delivering more than anything you'd typically expect from an arcade game. **B+**



GMA SAYS → Someone got strategy in my SlugFest! Yay, it's delicious!

➔ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | MARCH

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005 A NEW POINT OF VIEW

Developer: PS2/XB Publisher: ACCLAIM Developer: ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN

➔ Acclaim's game brings something unique to the field. When a ball is smacked into the outfield, the game switches viewpoints to the receiving outfielder as he moves his glove to catch the ball. From seeing a distant speck in the sky to hearing the clasp of leather, you get something decidedly different with this feature, although time will tell how well it integrates into the rest of the game. **B+**



GMA SAYS → Acclaim is attempting something unique, which is always welcome.

➔ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | MARCH

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2005 BACK IN LINE AND ONLINE

Developer: PS2 Publisher: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA Developer: 989

➔ Like any athlete, 989 has been through its slumps. But this might be the year for the turnaround with the advent of some much-needed improvements. From a good selection of old-time baseball legends to integrated online features, you might almost say these shots of bolstering improvements are like steroids, although MLB will still consider these drugs a no-no, videogame or not. **B+**



GMA SAYS → Living on the online welcome to the internet, baseball.

➔ HOW HOT...

ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K4 OUT IN TU LAND

Developer: PS2/XB Publisher: SEGA Developer: VISUAL CONCEPTS

➔ Sega's top-notch sports games continue their ESPNization, this time in baseball, with video transitions and cut-scenes that fully mirror the network's style. ESPN

commentators Jon Miller and Karl Ravech offer their vocals to match the sights and new gameplay additions—including the K-Zone strike-zone indicator and the Gamecast pitch

analyzer—to create a strong starting lineup for the new season. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Stick, stick, stick

➔ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | SPRING



XB

PC

PS2

PSA

GC

NOW

2004 is starting with a bang, that's for sure. Between Square Enix's excellent multiplayer addition for GameCube, and a great new sequel to one of gaming's most storied franchises, things are looking up for Nintendo. Of course, a fantastic old-school shooter and a great new NFL Blitz-beater are part of this month's top picks too. Enjoy your month!



HOW WE RATE

1 RAINFULNESS 2 ORSTACDLY 3 PITIFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMA SCORING SYSTEM

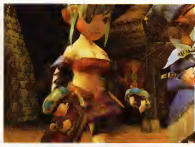
WARNING! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, GRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY.

6 GOOD STUFF 7 UNRECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	GC	0B1
SILENT STORM	PC	0B3
LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT	PC	0B3
TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM	PS2	0B3
BALOUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II	XB/PS2	0B4
FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL	PS2/XB	0B4
RISE TO HONOR	PS2	0B5
SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE	XB	0B5
FREESTYLE STREET SOCCER	XB/GC/PC	0B5
WINNING ELEVEN 7	PS2	0B5
CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH	PS2	0B5
NFL STREET	PS2/GC/XB	0B7
AIRFORCE DELTA STRIKE	PS2	0B8
R-TYPE FINAL	PS2	0B9
COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDICTION ZERO	PC	0B0
CREATIVE GIGAWORKS SP50	PS2/XB/GC/PC	0B1
METROID: ZERO MISSION	GBA	0B2
THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	GBA	0B3
YU YU HAKUSHO: SPIRIT DETECTIVE	GBA	0B3
KING OF FIGHTERS EX2: HOWLING BLOOD	GBA	0B3





FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

EVERGREEN

TEEN | GC

PUBLISHED: NOVEMBER
DEVELOPER: GAME DESIGNERS
SYSTEM: GC
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: FEBRUARY
PLAYERS: 1-4 (ONLINE CABLE
AND FISH EYE)
GENRE: ACTION

➔ The level of satisfaction you derive from *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* correlates directly to whether you look at it as a poor man's *Final Fantasy* or as the best damn game of *Gauntlet* you've ever laid eyes on. To begrudge *Crystal Chronicles* for not being a true *Final Fantasy* would be churlish, and yet it is understandable, as this game is difficult to pigeonhole.

The focus of *FFCC*, to be sure, is its multiplayer component, and yet it doesn't quite feel like a multiplayer game. Most multiplayer titles feature an array (staggering or not) of options. *FFCC* features one multiplayer option: to play the single-player story mode

with up to four people. On the flip side, while the single-player game is certainly enjoyable when played solo (much more so than *Phantasy Star Online*'s tedious offline single-player experience), it is admittedly far superior when played with friends.

The game's plot centers on a miasma-ravaged world (similar to Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä*) with but one saving grace: a blessed crystal that must be continually recharged with myrrh. You are a young adventurer leaving home for the first time to help your village obtain this precious myrrh, and *FFCC* quickly takes on a coming-of-age theme that is heartening to experience. As your character "grows,"

so does your attachment to the game.

Although gamers will most likely focus on taking one character through the years (advancement is made in terms of time, with each drop of myrrh collected equaling one quarter of a year), it is advised that you fill your game file with the maximum eight custom characters allowed. This affects your village (whether you play as the other characters or not) by adding additional merchants, shops, and villagers who are all related to the diverse roster of characters you've created. Few games have such a well-developed sense of community as this one, and it's a significant plus.

The game, however, is primarily a

GC



→ Creating a full cast of characters (up to 8) results in a more vibrant town, filled with extra shops and merchants. Also, you get to spray paint your moogles.



slog through a visually arresting set of areas [utilizing nearly every graphical trick in the book], resulting in an attractive but relatively simple affair of real-time enemy bashing, key finding, and door unlocking. Once completed, each non-village area ends with a boss of intimidating stature.

Played solo, you are accompanied and helped by a friendly mooglee (a staple in the Final Fantasy universe) who carries the chalice whose protective circumference keeps you safe. But when played with friends, the true beauty of the game shines through, as characters can combine attacks to unleash additional effects unavailable to single players. Certain

puzzles are also significantly easier when tackled as a group.

A robust item-creation system allows players to create objects by visiting blacksmiths who use items you have found in treasure chests or collected from enemies. However, a poor item-management system and an inability to store items (à la Diablo) makes juggling recipes, materials, and healing items a downright chore. It is also disappointing that FFCC forces players to use multiple GBAs for multiplayer play when a solution using standard controllers could easily have been designed.

Regardless, *Crystal Chronicles* is one of the most endearing action-RPGs to

come along in ages, thanks to its stellar character design [Toshiyuki Itahana, where have you been?], lavish visuals, and brilliant soundtrack composed by Kumi Tanio (the rousing year-end village theme song is particularly moving). While it may not be a true Final Fantasy, it is, when played in the right company, fairly fantastic. **A-**

James Mielke

GMR 8/10
BETTER THAN BAUNTLET DARK LEGACY
NOT AS GOOD AS PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EP I & II
WAIT FOR IT: TALES OF SYMPHONY

2ND OPINION

I've known for a while that *Crystal Chronicles* wasn't a 'real' Final Fantasy game, but now I'm finally over it. *Chronicles* is beautiful, usually and surely, and when played with friends, many hours are lost. But if I have to buy one more GBA, I'm sending Nintendo the bill. **A-**

Andrew Plaster

SILENT STORM

RAGING RUSSIANS STORM PCs

MATURE | PC

➔ If you've ever played *Jagged Alliance 2* and thought "Hot diggity, if this took place in World War II and was in 3D, it would rock," here is your dream game. For the rest of you who didn't understand that reference, just know that *Silent Storm* is a 3D turn-based tactical game taking place during World War II.

The core game involves guiding six soldiers (either Axis or Allied) through missions ranging from simple "defeat the enemy" to complicated affairs like

"assassinate the general" or "protect the scientist." Since the game is in totally destructible 3D, you can blow up walls, shoot through floorboards, or hurt guys through windows.

Fact is, despite some minor points (long enemy turns, mediocre voice acting, semiwonky camera), this is simply the best turn-based game on PC right now. Whether you're old school or new school, it's not to be missed. **B+**

—Thierry Nguyen



THE ENGINE
 100% REAL INTERACTIVE
 100% AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1
OS/REQ. WINDOWS

RECOMMENDED
GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN: DFC AFTERMATH
 NOT AS GOOD AS: JAGGED ALLIANCE 2
 WAIT FOR IT: LIESER SIGMUND NEHESS

LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

GRAB YOUR STICK AND GET OUT THERE

EVERYONE | PC

➔ An incredibly deep military flight simulator, *Lock On* is overwhelming, except for the most die-hard flight-stick jockeys. However, it would be tough to find a more impressive-looking flight sim. Each of the planes has been modeled realistically, including cockpits featuring full arrays of gauges and even Russian text in the MiGs. There are detailed maps and spectacular visual effects, including outstanding brutal explosions.

Lock On's campaign, though, is efficient but unimpressive, serving best as a model for using the formidable mission editor. That isn't to say that

the missions aren't challenging, but this is a result of *Lock On's* inherent difficulty. You'll have to master the techniques and controls to complete each objective—quite a challenge with such poor documentation.

Complex games such as these are often riddled with bugs and technical issues, and *Lock On* is no different. Framerate slowdown will hamper playability on the worst of systems, requiring you to turn down the details to get playable performance. If you're undaunted, the satisfying online play ensures that you'll have fun with this one for some time to come. **B+**

—Gerald Villoria



THE ENGINE
 100% REAL INTERACTIVE
 100% AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1-2 ONLINE PLAY
OS/REQ. WINDOWS

RECOMMENDED
GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: FALCON 4.0
 NOT AS GOOD AS: A SINGLE-ENGINE CESSNA
 WAIT FOR IT: FREE PDF MANUAL ON A LOCK-ON COMMUNITY SITE

GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM

DOES CAMO MAKE ME LOOK FAT?

TEEN | PS2

➔ *Ghost Recon* was a fine tactical infantry sim—back in 2001. This new PS2 version is solid, but it pales when compared to modern juggernauts like *SOCOM II*. However, if you can get past its ugly visage, *Ghost Recon* is still a solidly playable game.

Jungle Storm includes both the Island Thunder campaign (from the PC and Xbox versions) and the new Jungle Storm campaign. You lead your six-man squad through 16 missions, which range from securing enemy territory to that ol' favorite, rescuing hostages. If you have a headset, you can use slick voice commands to control your squads; otherwise, you have to rely on the serviceable joypad. Both offline and

online play are dandy, but man, does this game look its age.

Though dated, this is a solid game. If some fad makes off with your copy of *SOCOM II*, this makes for a decent backup in a pinch. **B+**

—Thierry Nguyen

THE ENGINE
 100% REAL INTERACTIVE
 100% AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1-2
OS/REQ. WINDOWS

RECOMMENDED
GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: GHOST RECON ISLAND THUNDER
 NOT AS GOOD AS: SOCOM II
 WAIT FOR IT: RAINBOW SIX 3

PC

PS2

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

AM. DRAGONS

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

➔ Cooperative games are supposed to be great fun, especially ones where you and your friends run around killing monsters and taking the weapons they don't have the arms to use and the gold they couldn't possibly spend in a place of business. So why is *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* such a chore to play, especially considering the high quality of its predecessor?

Could it be because Snowblind, the developer of the first *Dark Alliance*, decided it'd rather work on the similar—and superior—*Champions of Norrath*? Perhaps it's because you can play with only one other friend (in this day and age of multiple controller ports, this is inexcusable). Or maybe it's because hacking away at a flying kitchen table and its unholy army of flying chairs isn't quite as thrilling as it sounds on paper. Though, to be fair to the furniture, it was most likely possessed by some form of evil.

Other combat highlights include, but

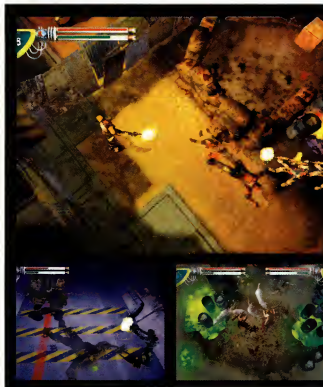
are not limited to, getting quadruple-teamed by the Olympic Sprint Team of the Undead, trying to figure out how that dog thing managed to poison you for the ninth time from 100 yards away, stepping on spike traps while trying to avoid other spike traps, and running around in circles with an enemy while your HP regenerates, hitting him one time with the Superior Sword of Apathy, and then resuming the dizzying dance. Although there are plenty of missions to complete and monsters to vanquish, even die-hard D&D fans might struggle to stay awake throughout this game. **E**

—Andrew Plister

DEV: INTERPLAY	VCES: \$49.99
DEV: BLACK ISLE STUDIOS	PLAYERS: 1-2
RE: AVAILABLE NOW	DESIGN: U.S.A.

GMR 6¹⁰ PUNCH GOLF IN

BETTER THAN RE-LOADED (PS1)
NOT AS GOOD AS CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH
ALSO TRY FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES



FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL WARRIORS OF THE WASTELAND

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

➔ Brawler, hack-n-slasher, action-RPG, whatever you want to call it, the specific game genre that *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* falls under suffers from some common problems.

Games like *BOS* tend to become tedious and long, compelling you to continue simply so you can level up and get stronger armor and bigger weapons. There's not really any roleplaying to speak of, although the mechanics are there. *BOS* does tend to get bogged down by tasks like clearing rooms full of mutants and monsters and scrounging for health packs. But *Fallout*'s clever setting, a campy postapocalyptic world (which was more fully explored in the original *Fallout* RPGs for PC) helps elevate the entire affair with a healthy dose of dark humor.

You play as a member of the Brotherhood, a cult of warriors who

roam the wastelands fighting the mutants and raiders who prey upon the unlucky humans who didn't find shelter in one of the huge underground fallout-proof vaults. The world and the creatures in it are ugly, but the graphics that render them are quite beautiful.

BOS is a decent example of the genre and has some creative design, but it won't blow any minds or win many awards. It does what it does well, but it sure won't save the world. **E**

—Tom Price

DEV: INTERPLAY	VCES: \$49.99
DEV: INTERPLAY	PLAYERS: 1-2
RE: AVAILABLE NOW	DESIGN: U.S.A.

GMR 6¹⁰ MARGARINE

BETTER THAN S.W.I.R.E.'S HEROES
NOT AS GOOD AS FALLOUT TACTICS
W-IT FOR IT: FALLOUT 3



RISE TO HONOR BREAK FACES

TEEN | PS2

➔ *Rise to Honor* could be mistaken for a lost Jet Li flick. While it lacks the zany hip-hop sensibilities of projects such as *Cradle 2 the Grave*, it's filled with even crazier fights. It's really a modern brawler with some gunplay thrown in.

The control scheme, through which you just tap the right analog stick in the direction you intend Digital Jet to attack, is almost responsive enough to be considered "fluid." While you give the right analog a workout, there's a pretty convincing flurry of punches and kicks

as Digital Jet smacks down six dudes at once. Throws, counters, adrenaline, and using both objects and the environment live up to the core combat.

Besides the not-quite-fluid-enough controls, the main problem is that shooting is a bit of a pain (you tap the right analog to throw your target and use R2 to shoot). Also, the bosses seem imbalanced since they sometimes execute the same moves you do, but their attacks hurt a whole lot more.

RTH is simplistic, fun, and filled with lots of pointless fighting and shooting.

Pretty much like Jet Li's American movie career. **B+**

—Thierry Nguyen



SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE SILENT, BUT NOT QUITE DEADLY

MATURE | XB

➔ When you get right down to it, the *Silent Scope* series features the wackiest shooters with a serious-sounding premise on record. You're a sniper taking out a cadre of evildoers from long range.

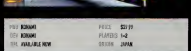
Nothing wrong with that. But some of those evildoers have huge Afros, wear loud sunglasses, and fly helicopters that have teddy bear faces painted on the front. See? Its tongue-in-cheek attitude has made it a good diversion in arcades and on consoles for the last few years.

A collection of all three *Scopes* seems like a great idea: Put three previously released light-gun games on one disc for Xbox, a system that has just one other light-gun title (Sega's *House of the Dead III*)...perfect. But while you will get to use that neon green lightning you bought for zombie killin', *Complete* doesn't offer fans of the series anything new.

In fact, scratch the "Complete" BS—this really should've been called *Silent Scope 3 Plus*, because the first two games are so short that your time is best spent uncovering the third installment's myriad secrets. It's got better gameplay than the other two as well, with a targeting magnet option that makes playing with a control pad considerably more fun. The world may never know why this opportunity wasn't used to go back to fix up the now extremely dated first two games—they look horrible.

Complete's saving grace is that Pelican has crafted a \$40 light rifle for Xbox designed specifically with this game in mind. Put your eye up to the sight and it zooms in automatically—it's about as close as you're going to get to the arcade *Scope* experience, if that's what you really want. **B+**

—Chris Johnston



FREESTYLE STREET SOCCER STREETS OF ENRAGED

TEEN | XB (REVIEWED) | GC | PC

➔ Street soccer is a real sport, but it's not happening on our streets. Out in pro-soccer countries (and by "pro soccer," I mean countries that call soccer "football"), kids kick balls in crowded alleys because they don't have large fields of grass.

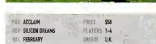
Freestyle Street Soccer would have you believe that the Crips and the Bloods decide their turf wars by kicking a ball around.

Street Soccer is essentially *NBA Jam*, but with soccer. It starts out easily enough, with its simple control and foot juggles, but then it drops in odd goal attacks, object throwing, and clumsy

controls. To do one of the special goal attacks, you must stand in a hot spot that appears on the field. Offensive moves like tackles feel clunky. There's also a full set of uninteresting urban ethnic stereotypes rendered in starkly dated graphics and loudmouth fake gangsta sound bites.

Basically, *Freestyle Street Soccer* can't decide whether it wants to make street soccer something serious or just create a twisted, tire-throwing, goofy gangsta world. In the end, *Street Soccer* misses the goal and simply gets a big red card. **D+**

—Johnny Liu



XB

PC

PS2

GC



WINNING ELEVEN 7 EVOLUTION, NOT REVOLUTION

EVERYONE | PS2

➔ After a stunning debut with *Winning Eleven 6*, Konami is back to prove it's no one-season wonder [ahem, Bayer Leverkusen] with...yes, *Winning Eleven 7*. As with all sports sequels, though, a new edition didn't quite bring a complete overhaul to last year's successful formula—but it does bring a succession of tweaks and additions, making it even better than before.

The ball no longer glides over the pitch; instead, imperfections in the turf cause the occasional bobbie or bounce. This allows for a slew of new control options designed to deal with awkwardly bouncing balls, including an awesome over-the-head flick and (finally!) a

proper volleying system, allowing you to strike a ball in midair and send it rocketing toward the top corner.

The master league mode has also been upgraded, with an initially confusing structure that apes that of the European leagues. Rather than one top division, there are now four, with cup competitions adding some interleague play. The new competitions bring some depth and variety to the setup.

The downsides from last year's game remain, although they're minor. A precious few teams aside, there's still no license, FIFA's presentation is still leagues ahead, and the commentary team is still stuck in Division III [in layman's terms: They suck]. And there's still no online play.

But it's the little things that count, and from the minor [new training minigames] to the major [24 new club teams] to the why-didn't-they-think-of-that-before [referees playing the advantage with fouls], it's all here. *WE6* was the finest football game around; *WE7* has raised the bar even higher. **A-**

—Ravi Hiranand



DEV: KONAMI
REV: KCEZ
REL: FEBRUARY

PRICE: \$29.99
PLAYERS: 2-8
DESIGN: KONAMI

THROW IN

GMR 9¹⁰

BETTER THAN WEA
STILL BETTER THAN FIFA
WOUT FOR IT... EURO 2004, FORZA AZZURRI

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH THE AX MEETS THE HEAD ONCE AGAIN

TEEN | PS2

➔ What's a development team to do once it has hit a home run with the phenomenally successful and well-crafted *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*? The answer is *Champions of Norrath*, another top-down action-RPG that actually goes so far as to outclass the *Dark Alliance* sequel itself.

Up to four players take their pick from a variety of *EverQuest*-inspired characters, ranging from weapon-oriented warriors and rangers to magic-wielding wizards and clerics. There's also a shadow knight class, which provides something of a balance between swordplay and spellcasting.

Once you've made your choice, you'll embark on an expansive Gauntlet-like series of missions and dungeon crawls, cutting down monsters and grabbing loads of valuable treasure. Characters gain additional levels as they progress, as well as precious attribute points, which are used to enhance various qualities like strength, stamina, weapon skills, and magic spells.

The game's five-act story sees your character enlisted by the elves of Faydwer to help defend against a local orc menace, though this simple plot evolves quite a bit as you move forward. When you're not busy dealing with all the story-based encounters and locations, you'll come across plenty of optional wilderness and

dungeon areas populated with random monsters and items that change with each playthrough. Throw in three difficulty levels and multiplayer support (with either a Multitap or a Network Adaptor) and you've got a lengthy and highly replayable adventure.

The game isn't a technical breakthrough by any means, but it looks and sounds just fine. Character models are best detailed, reflecting their current equipment choices. The music and sound effects are pleasant, though the voice acting can get pretty bad at times. Controls are intuitive and well placed, making the game very easy to pick up and play.

All told, *Champions of Norrath* is an enjoyable actionfest that fans of *Dark Alliance* will love. It also makes a fine party game, giving you plenty of incentive to posse up with some friends for a few evenings of mindless *EverQuest* fun. **B+**

—Ryan Scott

PS2 SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT PRICE: \$49.99
DEV: SHIMMERHO STUDIOS PLAYERS: 1-4
REL: FEBRUARY GENRE: ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE
ALSO BETTER THAN: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS HEROES
WAIT FOR IT: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE





← As NFL Blitz moves closer and closer to realism, EA goes the other way and runs the arcade-sports football genre down like Barry Sanders charging up the middle.



NFL STREET

NO KICKERS. NO FLAGS. NO KIDDING

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

➔ Arcade-style football games have seemingly gone out of fashion, but apparently no one told the folks at EA Big. Its entry into the uncrowded market is not only as fun, polished, and complete as anything you'd expect from EA, it is also the next step in the Street franchise.

NFL Street is as much fun as football can be. Or even more. Imagine playing a game of pickup pigskin and getting to choose your players from the rosters of real NFL teams. Then imagine playing those games in a universe where slamming a guy against a brick wall at full speed not only elicits no major head trauma but doesn't even necessarily cause a

fumble. The action in *NFL Street* is fast, furious, and so much fun it'll make Gatorade shoot out of your nose.

Game modes include pickup games that let you pick seven players from a single NFL team or a randomly generated list of stars and the NFL challenge mode, in which you build a team of rookies and update their stats and abilities by completing various scenarios. The only thing missing is a simple pro season mode. But things like online play and the inclusion of some classic players (Walter Payton, Howie Long, Ronnie Lott, etc.) more than make up for it. Playing through all the challenges will take weeks, and pickup games against your friends are

always a quick fix.

Deep understanding of football and mastery of complex plays are wasted talents when it comes to *NFL Street*. Most players will find their own unique strategies but stick to a small number of specific plays that work most of the time. That doesn't diminish the game as much as streamline it. A play editor would be undeniably sweet, though. **B+**

—Tom Price

2ND. OPINION

I love the *NFL Street* games, and although I dig on Madden, I'd really much rather play something that's just good fun and, to be honest, less of a sim. Well, that's what *NFL Street* is, and when I just want a little pick-up-and-play action, Street is the game that scratches that itch. **B+**
—James Mielke

PUBLISHED: EA GIG
DEVELOPER: NINE
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-2
OS: PC, XBOX

GMR FORMERLY **8/10**

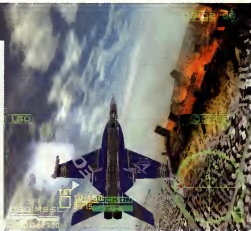
BETTER THAN NFL BLITZ
NOT AS GOOD AS NBA STREET
WAIT FOR IT: NBA STREET 2

XB

PS2

GC

→ It takes a while, but after a few missions, some really cool aircraft become available for purchase in the shop. Aside from the planes you see in the pictures below, you can open up the classic Konami craft Vic Viper, star of the upcoming *Gradius V*. Be careful with her, though. That'd be one heinous repair bill...



AIRFORCE DELTA STRIKE

THE PLANES. THEY FLY

TEEN | PS2

➔ In 1999, Namco gave Japanese gamers *Ace Combat 3: Electrosphere*, a futuristic, story-driven dogfighter that fuses semirealistic aerial combat with sci-fi vehicle design and an anime aesthetic. Anticipating that Western consumers weren't keen on things like plot, the American release was stripped down to the basic (yet solid) fire-missile-at-target fun that the *Ace Combat* series is known for. It seems that Konami, believing Namco passed up a good thing, picked up the concepts cut from *Electrosphere* and plugged them into *Airforce Delta Strike*. The added character renders a familiar formula worthwhile and saves the game from

being just another flyby.

In the future, the military is run by chatty 19-year-olds with severe attitude problems—think *Airforce 90210*. One wouldn't dare request radio silence with this group; everyone has plenty to say during the battle. While it keeps excitement high and your mind in the fight—the satisfying declaration of “Fox 2!” in particular—pilots will consistently talk over each other, which is not especially helpful when you're trying to filter out vital mission objectives and information. This, much like the entirety of the game, is forgivable. *Delta Strike* contains no single major problem, just an assortment of smaller ones: limited yaw control, repetitive

missions, instances of graphical pop-up, and a steep financial penalty for crashing your jet.

Most combat objectives are immediately recognizable to anyone who's logged a few hours in either *Ace Combat* or *Airforce Delta*. Not that this is really a bad thing, because ultimately, the sci-fi story and design is sufficiently compelling. **B+**

—Andrew Plister

GMR

BETTER THAN LETHAL SKIES II
NOT AS GOOD AS ACE COMBAT 4
WAIT FOR THE STAR FOX 2

IN YOUR
7/10

2ND OPINION

my problem with the *Airforce Delta* series was that I always had *Ace Combat*, so why would I need this bland anonymous dogfighting? Well, at least now the series has character (thanks, Rampo Murata!) and some cool hidden ships, like Vic Viper. That's all I needed to sway me over to *Delta Strike*. **B+**

—James Melike

PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: KONAMI
PRICE: \$29.99
RELEASE: FEBRUARY
PLATFORMS: PS2
COUNTRY: JAPAN



R-TYPE FINAL

WHAT A WAY TO GO

EVERYONE | PS2

➔ It's not often you get a swan song, a trip down memory lane, and an exciting new addition to a dying genre bundled all in one go, and yet that's exactly what developer Irem has crafted in the 2D shooter to end them all: *R-Type Final*. While it's not technically 2D in execution (the graphics are very 3D), all the action takes place on a two-dimensional plane, just like all the great shooters of old.

A bittersweet love letter to fans of the genre and self-proclaimed end of the *R-Type* series, *Final* provides—as expected—an overwhelmingly intense single-player experience in which the player does his best Buck Rogers, sending the beloved R-ships through an increasingly brutal set of effects-crazy environments. This is no crash course in masochism, though. While the *R-Type* games have always been difficult, the joy is in deciphering the best course in which to traverse a level. Is the giant battleship coursing through the city level getting the best of you? Well, practice makes perfect, and that's always been the hallmark of the *R-Type* games. Improvement is measured in minutes played and your score tally at game's end. Try beating the game using one ship.

What makes *Final* extraspecial is the encyclopedic collection of classic Irem ships (more than 100) that

can be unlocked. Ships from all the past games make an appearance, but so too do craft from other Irem classics such as *Mr. Heli* and *Image Fight* (although sadly not the submarine from *In the Hunt*). Each ship offers a brief history and can be inspected in full 3D, customized down to the color of the canopy and equipped with weaponry to taste. They can then be flown through the game manually or in the game's innovative A.I. mode, in which your programmed ship attempts to fly itself through the game.

Intensely beautiful, highly playable, and downright inspired, *R-Type Final* is a somber but fitting end to a legendary series. A stellar combination of style, substance, and class. **A—James Mielke**

PLAY BOX	PRICE \$29.99
REV. FEBRUARY	PLATES JAPAN

GMR BETTER THAN KARASU
NOT AS GOOD AS RACHAT SILVERGUN (SS)
WAIT FOR IT: GRADUS V

PREMIUM
9th

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DEGREE PROGRAM



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←The models in both sub games of Condition Zero are better rendered and higher resolution than they were before. Obviously a lot of time was put into making them look up to date and complex, but that seems to be the only real major upgrade of the game. It takes a whole lot more to make a game that does right by the CS name and compels us to play it over, say, Rainbow Six.

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

TOO MUCH, TOO LATE?

MATURE | PC

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSEL
DEVELOPER: SAIGY
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: 1/18/02
ONLINE: U.S.A.

➔ The story of how the expansion/sequel to the venerated online shooter Counter-Strike finally came to be after three years and at least four development teams is a long one. So one might expect the long-awaited final product to have something to show for all that time. Sadly, it doesn't.

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero is actually two games in one. The first is a fairly standard reworking of the same Counter-Strike that PC gamers have known and loved for years, with a few minor upgrades and a scenario-based single-player campaign. The second is a more traditional story-based first-person shooter that resembles a Half-

Life mod with a similar counter-insurgency theme. The first is too little too late. The second is more ambitious, but a complete mess.

The better iteration is good old CS, but with higher-res textures and a cool single-player campaign: playing traditional CS against a team of bots. Each map has a series of challenges that earn you points which you then spend on recruiting better bots for your team. The bots are well programmed and mimic a lot of human player behavior. But ultimately it's the same old CS with two new low-end rifles and a couple of other items. Oh, and you only get to play as the counter-terrorists. Larne.

The second game, called Deleted Scenes, gives us a glimpse of what was to be, with a more traditional single-player experience that adds a lot more to the CS universe in the way of items and tactics. At times it's great, at other times it's buggy and unfinished. What a waste. Condition Zero does not do the Counter-Strike name proud. **D-**

Tom Price

GMR FLASH REBORN S/10

BETTER THAN GLOBAL OPERATIONS
NOT AS GOOD AS GOOD OLD COUNTER-STRIKE
WAIT FOR IT: FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

2ND. OPINION

Between Condition Zero for PC and Counter-Strike for Xbox I'm feeling kind of empty on the inside. I was looking forward to enjoying the simple agro pleasures of Counter-Strike without all the messy patch downloads from Sweden, and yet none of the new options are worth respecting the original's wasted potential. **D-** James Miske

HARDWARE

BECAUSE 500 WATTS JUST WASN'T ENOUGH



CREATIVE GIGAWORKS S750

THE SOUND YOU HEAR IS YOUR BUTT GETTING KICKED

PS2 | XB | GC | PC

➔ A day in the life of a tech editor sees more crappy PC speakers than most people would think possible. When it comes to PC speakers, or videogame speakers made by a PC-speaker-making company, expectations are usually pretty low. After all, if you want true high fidelity, you're going to want a new set of tubes and a budget in the thousands of dollars, aren't you? Not anymore you're not.

Creative Labs is on a roll these days, whether it's cranking out high-value Nomad (or MuVo) MP3 players or Sound Blaster PC soundcards. And while the company has always made good PC speakers, it has never made them quite like this. The THX-certified Creative GigaWorks S750 works something all right. It works your whole body. A 7.1 [that's right, your 5.1 system is so 10 minutes ago] 700-watt surround system that supports Dolby Digital EX, DTS

ES, and the as-yet unexploited Neo.6 sound standards (plus stereo, if you're into that kind of thing), the GigaWorks is the audio equivalent of a lethal weapon.

To put this monster to the test, we put it through a two-day warm-up of playing nothing but *Absolutely Fabulous* DVDs to help break the speakers in. Once the seven speakers and the phat-bottomed subwoofer had settled into their natural tonal ranges, we brought out the big guns. One by one we assaulted the GigaWorks (or vice versa) with the Superbit editions of such sonically diverse movies as *The Fifth Element*, *Leon: The Professional*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, as well as sonic power-hitters *Star Wars Episode I* [crappy movie, great sound], *Any Given Sunday*, the DTS version of *Akira*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, and the boom-bastic mother of them all, *Saving Private Ryan*.

The sound that emerged from Creative's 700-watt

baby would crush most college students, offering crisp highs, a distinctive midrange, and some threateningly punchy bass. We'd like to use the word "overkill," but that's what the volume control is for. At \$499.99, the system is a competitive value and is built to survive future generations of upwardly mobile sound design. With more optical, analog, and coaxial inputs than you probably need, the GigaWorks will meet nearly any sound situation head on, and then some. **✪**

—James Mielke

PRO	CREATIVE LABS	PRICE	\$499.99
REV	CREATIVE LABS	SPECS	WWW.CREATIVE.COM
SEL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR

9th



GBA REVIEWS

SAMUS AARON RETURNS TO KICK BUTTS. AGAIN. BUTTS THAT SEEM STRANGELY FAMILIAR. AND YET OH SO NEW

METROID: ZERO MISSION

GUNPEI YOKOI WOULD BE PROUD

EVERYONE | GBA

It's hard to believe that nearly 17 years have passed since Nintendo first released *Metroid* out into the wild. Amazingly, half the people reading this probably weren't even born then, so they probably won't recognize the impact *Metroid* has had on gaming.

When Samus Aran first dipped into deep space, landing on the planet Zebes, she was accompanied by an unprecedented level of exploration that no other game had ever offered. Sure, *Zelda* let you blow a hole in a wall, and Mario would slip down a tube or two, but nothing could compare to *Metroid's* labyrinthine secret corridors, destructible walls, and ball-sized crevices.

Things we might take for granted today were true innovations then, in particular the weapon upgrades and, especially, the morph ball. Games like *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (and all that followed) owe more to *Metroid* than today's gamer might realize.

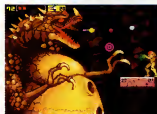
So, what of *Zero Mission* then? In part a re-creation of the original *Metroid*, while adding enough new material to qualify as a true remix, this could be thought of as *Metroid 1.5*. While the game retains the basic maps of the NES *Metroid* (you'll

recognize things the instant you start up the game) and the weapons remain essentially the same, enemies have been reinvented (Kraid is a big'un now), and the story has been expanded and finessed, making *Zero Mission* a compelling play even for veterans of the original game.

As always, the series continues to offer precise, responsive controls, allowing gamers to battle screen-filling bosses with no hesitation and tackle platform jumps over boiling lava pits without fear. Wisely, the game dials out weapon and suit upgrades gradually, enabling players to grow comfortable with one skill set before adding another. Graphically, *Zero Mission* draws from the same detailed palette that *Fusion* uses, offering superbly animated sprites and a host of great 2D effects.

Where *Zero Mission* really adds to the legend is in the game's challenging surprise ending. We won't give anything away here, but this isn't your daddy's *Metroid*. A slightly underwhelming art gallery is unlocked (wow) for *Fusion* owners who link up to *Zero Mission*, but it's a mere footnote on an otherwise flawless example of 2D game design. **B+**

—James Mielke



Get your Chozo on is better than ever in *Metroid Zero Mission*. The game just might be the best in the series yet, and it makes you wonder just how good a Super *Metroid* remake would be. If you want to maximize your appreciation of this game, it's worth firing up the original *Metroid* (if you have it on NES) or playing it in *Metroid Prime* for GameCube. That's time well spent.

PLAY	INTENDED	PRICE	DEV	FR
SEP	INTENDED	PLAYERS	1	
30	FEBRUARY	GEN	JAPAN	

GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
ALSO TRY CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
WAIT FOR IT: MEGA MAN MANIA



THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

THE SIM-PLE LIFE

EVERYONE | GBA

➔ Much like L.A. socialites Paris and Nicole landing in Altus, AR, your *Sims* character is a fish out of water when he or she lands in Uncle Hayseed's very un-*Sims*-like Sim Valley farm. But unlike those heiresses, they'll have no trouble winning over the farmer's heart and working their way up in the world—from scrounging up cast-off appliances for a barn-turned-bedroom to living in a swanky estate.

Much more RPG-ish than its console brethren, *Bustin' Out* for GBA has you running errands, making friends (or, if you like to live dangerously, enemies), and shopping for stuff to furnish your abode, *Animal Crossing*-style. There's even an island to visit if you hook up with the GameCube version of the game. And instead of heading off to a mysterious job that you never witness, you sell stuff you find around town and play minigames, including catching fish and making pizzas, to earn those precious simoleons.

None of these tasks are earth-shatteringly exciting or terribly challenging, but completing goals in each level is compelling as you work your way up to bigger and better pads to store your ever-increasing cache of stuff. And the changes from typical *Sims* fare work perfectly in handheld mode, with a pace quick enough for gaming on the go.

Building skills such as Logic and Charisma, as well as keeping your Sim's needs met, are an integral part of the game and help keep things Sim-y, but this game lacks the unpredictable wackiness that makes the *Sims* series so much fun. It's a fun game, especially for younger players, but it feels slightly more hokey than Hollywood. **B+**

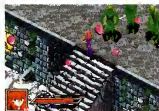
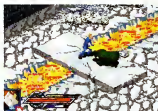
—Carrie Shepherd



200	ELECTRONIC ARTS	PRICE	\$29.99
200	WIREMOUTH GAMES	PLAYERS	1
200	AVAILABLE NOW	STATUS	USA

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN: HW: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN
WORSE THAN: ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
NOT QUITE: PARIS HILTON



YU YU HAKUSHO: SPIRIT DETECTIVE

WHEN NOSE GOBLINS ATTACK

TEEN | GBA

➔ Yusuke Urameshi, Yu Yu Hakusho's spirit detective, should investigate such things as good graphics, a fighting engine, and a clean, safe alternative to the fetch quest.

The popular Japanese anime gets butchered here, and the in-game characters seem to have been modeled after the developers' nose goblins. What seems like these unattractive blobs jerking and spazzing convulsively after French-kissing the electric socket are actually "fights." Players slide Urameshi up to an enemy and hammer the Attack button until something—good or ill, it

matters not—happens. Mazes are set up to ensure that every item that wants fetching will be good and tedious to find. In short, blech. **D+** —Greg Orlando

200	ENVI	PRICE	\$29.99
200	SHIBUYA SHIP	PLAYERS	1
200	AVAILABLE NOW	STATUS	JAPAN

GMR 2/10

NOT AS GOOD AS: PLAYING A GAME BOY ADVANCE
WITHOUT A CARTRIDGE IN IT
BETTER THAN: SAIRS
WAIT FOR IT: SCORCH DOO 2: GBA

KING OF FIGHTERS EX2:

HOWLING BLOOD

MINI MANHANDLERS ARE GO!

TEEN | GBA

➔ Hallelujah. Game company SNK has pulled itself from the ashes. With the resurrection comes much happiness and the knowledge its beloved *King of Fighters* series will not pass into oblivion.

King of Fighters EX2: Howling Blood returns the *Fighters* series to fine handheld form. Although the game is best tackled in two-player versus mode, the single-player story mode (pitting three brawlers against a three-man A.I. squad) certainly offers a decent, if a bit easily beaten, challenge.

A sharp Striker attack system allows a player to call in a teammate on the fly to distract or duly smite an enemy, and despite an awkward two-button, two-shoulder-trigger system, the fighting is absolutely mad-dog-howling good. **B+**

—Greg Orlando



200	SNK	PRICE	\$29.99
200	SNK PLAYMORE: SNK-TEC	PLAYERS	1-2
200	AVAILABLE NOW	STATUS	JAPAN

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: FINAL FIGHT ONE (GBA)
NOT AS GOOD AS: GUILTY GEAR X: ADVANCE EDITION
WAIT FOR IT: RIVER CITY RANSOM (GBA)

GBA

MORE



TIPS, CODES, ONLINE, AND MORE



THIS MONTH IN MORE

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES 95

→ Ten years gone—better have something to show for it

TOP 10 TIPS: A.I. 98

→ Get your Toad on in Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

CONNECT 100

→ Is *Ultima Online* entering its renaissance?

RETRO/ACTIVE 102

→ We do the monster mash

THE LIST 104

→ Makes for excellent dinner conversation

GAME GEEZER 110

→ *Prince of Persia* is a royal pain



FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

GMA CALLS SHOTGUN ON THE CRYSTAL CARAVAN

THE CRYSTAL METHOD

➔ *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* is no *FF* in structure: The story is divided into years, and you complete a year by collecting myrrh from three of the game's 14 dungeons. You can finish the game as early as year 5, but as long as you don't conquer Mt. Vellenge (the final level), you can play for as many years as you want. It'd be wise to spend a few years strengthening your character before tackling Vellenge, but the story peters out by year 10, so there's little point in wasting virtual decades.

RACE RELATIONS

➔ Your fighter is from one of four races: clavats (excessively average), lilty (good with weapons), yuke (good with magic), or selkie (very fast). Race doesn't drastically affect the game, but your job does—make sure your main character is a merchant, blacksmith, or alchemist. Your dad will give you discounts on whatever it is he sells, which helps immensely when you're building equipment later on.

It's worth noting that each race has its own favorite food—striped apples for clavats, meat for lillies, dried carrots for yukes, and fish for selkies. These items offer more than strength bonuses; they're also an easy way to refill life when you're too harried to cast Cure on yourself.



FREE STUFF

➔ Nearly every town has one out-of-the-way place you can examine to uncover a hidden item. One easy-to-find example: the cliff on the northwest side of Tita, your home village. These hidden items are replenished every time you finish a dungeon and get a drop of myrrh. It's worth your time to visit every town after doing so—the items start out dinky (seeds and such), but they soon graduate to mythical and other handy accessories.



FRUITY FLAGONS

➔ Since the world is covered in miasma, one person has to go around each dungeon, carrying a crystal chalice to protect the rest of the party. Leave the chalice's range, and your life starts taking it in the chin [the exact rate of damage depends on race]. The chalice bearer recovers life twice as fast as normal, though, so hand the cup over to a friend if he's about to die.

SPECIAL MOMENTS

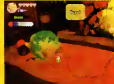
➔ Memories, the way *FFCC* defines them, are the small movie scenes that play now and again as you navigate your caravan between dungeons. They're activated by satisfying certain objectives kept internally within the game, but they tend to crop up more and more in the latter half of

your journey. These memories are actually required for the final battle, so try to gather at least 40 before tackling the endgame.



MOOGLE CARE

➔ If you're playing by yourself, you'll be accompanied by Mog, who carries your chalice and casts bits of magic during battles. Exactly what kind of magic he uses depends on what color you paint him: red for Fire, green for Thunder, and blue for Blizzard. You can also cut his hair, which is actually helpful in spots—give him a trim before entering a desert or volcanic area, and he won't get fatigued and force you to carry the chalice so often.



SURVIVING THOSE MIASMA BLAHS

➔ On the surface, *FFCC* is simple in structure: Bash the A button till you drop, and you'll muddle your way through the early dungeons simply enough. This is fine and all, but after a couple of years, the enemies become worryingly powerful—taking two hearts off your life gauge in one swipe and such. This is bad. We need a strategy.

FIGHT LIKE A MAN

➔ *FFCC* is all about stick-and-move—come up close to an enemy, dodge its blow, and strike back with an attack of your own. The special move at your disposal depends on which weapon you've equipped yourself with, so try to find one that lets you launch physical attacks from long range. It'll make poisoning from scorpions and other nonmagical enemies a thing of the past.

It's also wise to take advantage of the terrain when dealing with very large enemies. The creatures in *FFCC*, not being all that smart, will blithely try to chase you down narrow corridors regardless of whether they can actually fit inside. If you can trap them between two walls or behind a well-placed rock, you'll be free to rain magic from afar without fear of retribution. This tactic will be your closest friend near the end, when death knights are charging at you willy-nilly.



BELIEVE IN MAGIC

➔ *FFCC*'s magic system lets you combine lesser spells with great thundering storms of offensive force. Two Thunder spells give you Thundara, three give you Thundaga, and so forth. You can combine spells automatically within your own inventory, or you can match up crosshairs with your friends to ad-lib combos.

As you experiment with this system, you'll want to know about two spell combos in particular: Gravity (two different elemental spells thrown together) and Holy (any elemental spell plus Life). Gravity forces all airborne enemies to the ground, which lets you whack at them with your sword more easily, and Holy is the only attack that has much of an effect against undead creatures. These two spells are your friends. Use them.



LUCK OF THE DRAW

➔ Unlike in most RPGs, you cannot become more powerful in *FFCC* simply by trouncing hundreds of enemies. Instead, you have to hunt down artifacts—special items hidden in treasure chests in each dungeon. After you defeat a boss, you get to pick a single artifact out of the pile you collected in the previous level. You can also unlock extra artifacts by fulfilling the "bonus condition" in each dungeon, displayed on your Game Boy Advance screen if you're playing with one (if not, you're screwed).

Are you in a hurry to build your character? Then look for these artifacts: Masamune (+5 offense, found in Kilanda Volcano), the Aegis Shield (+5 defense, found in Demon's Court), and the Ribbon (+9 magic, found in Rebera Te Ra).



ULTIMA WEAPONS

➔ Yes, there are Ultima weapons in this *Final Fantasy*—but earning these all-powerful tools requires careful planning and (probably) multiple players. Here's the basic idea:

- Make three characters—a blacksmith, a merchant, and an alchemist—in the same caravan.
- Play the game normally with all three fighters. The trio must all have top-level relationships with their families—you do this by sending money and items to them in the mail.
- Get the items you need for the recipe. You'll need one piece of orichalcum (get it from the behemoths in Conall Curach) and one piece of ultimate (your merchant's family starts selling it if you build a good relationship).

Once a few years have passed, everything should be set. Get the recipe for the weapon from the alchemist's family, get a piece of ultimate from the merchant's family, and have the blacksmith's family forge the weapon for 45,000 gil. Voilà.



TOO MUCH WORK?

➔ Well, there are three race-specific weapons—Ragnarok, Longinus, and Grand Slam—that are just as powerful as the Ultima gear. You get the recipes for these randomly as bonus artifacts after completing Rebera Te Ra, Kilanda Volcano, and Conall Curach, respectively. The raw materials you'll need are mostly rare artifact bonuses, though, so it's much easier to just make the Ultima weapon for your race instead. Really. Go get some friends.

THE FINAL BATTLE

➔ By the time year 6 rolls around, you'll want to begin seriously thinking about completing the game. Like any decent Square RPG, there's a long, drawn-out final sequence, and you won't have any hope of surviving unless you have pent-up strength and a goodly amount of magic on your side. So level up a bit, eh?

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

➔ The final dungeon is blocked by an "unknown" mist stream that cannot be crossed, no matter what element your crystal chalice is set on. The game offers ample hints on how to deal, but here's the step-by-step process:

- Go to Lynari Desert.
- Cast Thunder on the largest cactus in the area, near the upper-left corner of the map.
- Cast Gravity on the abandoned caravan camp, near the upper-right corner.
- Cast Fire on the mushroom-shaped rock formation on the eastern end of the map, right by a whirlpool.
- Cast Blizzard on the three rocks standing by themselves on the left-hand side of the map. Hit the smallest rock first, then work your way up to the largest one.

Once you do all that, a flower will appear near a set of bones toward the west. Cast Holy on it to reveal a hotspot and stick your chalice on the hotspot to change its attribute to Unknown. Now you can penetrate the stream—and you won't have to alter your chalice's attribute ever again, either.



COCODINO

➔ Beyond the stream lies a map with two locations: Mt. Vellence and the "village" of Mag Mell. The town is populated by carbuncles, ancient creatures with all sorts of arcane knowledge about the world's past. Trouble is, they're all asleep. To wake them up, talk to the lone visible carbuncle, go out and complete a dungeon (any one you will do), then come back again.



MT. VELLENGE

➔ Your top mission in this gloomy, chimera-infested volcano is to get three of any offensive magic. Why? Because the final battle is well-nigh impossible without some type of "ga" spell in your arsenal, that's why. You'll also need to watch for dark crystals, scattered throughout the second part of the dungeon. These buggers render your chalice useless if you bring it near them, resulting in death within seconds. Luckily, you can destroy the crystals by bopping them a few times—just make sure you drop the chalice far away while doing so.



METEOR PARASITE

➔ The final confrontation begins with this giant beast, which undergoes two transformations as you beat it senseless. The general idea is the same for all three forms: avoid its magic attacks and cast your own magic on the tentacle-like vine when it appears. After changing forms, the parasite begins firing lasers and machine-gun-like bursts of explosions at you. Fortunately, these are simple to dodge: The bursts don't reach the far edge of the arena, and if you're a little, you can hug the parasite and completely avoid the lasers without breaking a sweat.



RAEM

➔ The real final boss is stupefyingly strong, but at least his attacks are straightforward. One pattern that works nicely: Approach Raem straight on, break to the side to avoid his wing attack, then dash in and attack while he's recovering. It's not until his second form that things get a bit antsy. See that ball floating in the air? Cast Cure on it, and it'll cough up a random magic spell that goes off instantly...no casting time, in other words. Each of these special spells takes up one of your memories when used, so the more cut-scenes you viewed in the game, the easier a time you'll have here. Beyond that, there's little to say—hopefully you have armloads of phoenix downs left in stock. ♣





A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL, BUT HE IS NOT

We suspect that quite a few of you got at least one of these games for Christmas. We also suspect that your short attention spans already have you playing something else. Allow us to freshen up your experience....

01 MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

We know the pickings for great games on GameCube have been kind of slim lately, but Mario Kart is one you definitely need to try out. Once you get behind the wheel with a koopa shell in hand, you'll be hooked. There are also a ton of new cars, modes, and characters to unlock—and the really sweet part is that you can unlock them all in multiplayer mode. Here's how you get them.

Unlockable

Green Fire (kart)
Bloom Coach (kart)
Para Wing (kart)
Battle Buggy (kart)
Waluigi Racer (kart)
Special Cup (mode)
Bullet Blaster (kart)
Toad, Toadette, and Toad Kart
Luigi's Mansion (battle environment)
Turbo Birdo (kart)
Barrel Train (kart)
All Cup Tour (mode)
Mirror Mode
Toadette Kart
Tit Table (battle environment)
Pete's Piranha and King Boo (characters)
Parade Kart

How you get it

Win a gold in the Mushroom Cup in 50cc
Win a gold in the Flower Cup in 50cc
Win a gold in the Star Cup in 50cc
Win a gold in the Mushroom Cup in 100cc
Win a gold in the Flower Cup in 100cc
Win a gold in the Star Cup in 100cc
Win a gold in the Special Cup in 50cc
Win a gold in the Special Cup in 100cc
Win a gold in the Mushroom Cup in 150cc
Win a gold in the Special Cup in 150cc
Win a gold in the Star Cup in 150cc
Win a gold in the All Cup Tour in 150cc
Win a gold in the mirror mode of Mushroom Cup
Win a gold in the mirror mode of Flower Cup
Win a gold in the mirror mode of Star Cup
Win a gold in the mirror mode of All Cup Tour



03 JAK II

Here's how to pull off the sweetest tricks for the optimal score in the hoverboard races.

Nose Flip X + Up + L1
Method X + Down + L1
Kick Flip X + Left + L1
Board Spin X + Right + L1
Front Flip X + Up + R1
Back Flip X + Down + R1
Clockwise Spin X + Right + R1
CCW Spin X + Left + R1
Superman X + Up + L1
(need high altitude)



04 AMPED 2

We know what you're thinking. Snowboarding is fun, but it's nothing compared to snowboarding as a yeti. Here are some cool unlockable characters and cheats to enter in, appropriately, the Cheat menu.

Characters

Bunny Character Bunny
Yeti Character GoTeamYeti
Bigfoot Character BrotherOfYeti

Cheats

Board Uphill FastMove
Maximum Skills MaxSkills
All Ice Terrain AllIce



02 THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

We love The Sims, but it can be a pain to keep all those needs in the green, so here are some cheats to make it a little easier. Once you reveal the gnome, enter the Fill Motives code and then click the gnome to green up.

PS2

Reveal Gnome R2, L1, R1, L2, Left on D-pad, Circle
Fill Motives L2, R1, Left on D-pad, Circle, Up on D-pad
Unlock All Socials L1, R1, Down on D-pad, X, L3, R3

Xbox

Reveal Gnome R, L, Down on D-pad, Black, Left on D-pad, B
Fill Motives R, Left on D-pad, B, Down on D-pad, White
Unlock All Socials L, R, A, Down on D-pad, Black

GC

Reveal Gnome Down on D-pad, L, Z, R, Left on D-pad, Right on D-pad
Fill Motives Down on D-pad, R, Left on D-pad, Right on D-pad, Down on D-pad
Unlock All Socials L, R, Down on D-pad, Down on D-pad, Y



05 TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3

Without a doubt, Rainbow Six 3 was one of the best games on Xbox in 2003. Here are some quick codes to spice things up a little more. Enter them at any time during gameplay.

Invincibility Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A

Laser Trails Up, Down, Up, Down, click in the Right analog stick twice



06 CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE PS2

➔ Castlevania once again tries to make the leap to 3D, and believe it or not, it actually doesn't suck this time. Here are some of the cool unlockables and how to get them.

Unlockable	How you get it
All Skills	Beat the game as Leon, then start a new game with the name @LLSKILL
Crazy Mode	Beat the game as Leon, then start a new game with the name @CRAZY
Jade Mask	Beat the game as Leon. The mask will be available in Rinaldo's shop for 999 Gold
Joachim Armster	Beat the game as Leon, then start a new game with the name @JDACHIM
Pumpkin Mode	Beat the game as Joachim Armster, save, then start a new game with the name @PUMPKIN



07 FATAL FRAME 2 PS2

➔ Fatal Frame 2 is chock-full of hidden stuff, including some cool costumes for the twins. Here's how you get them.

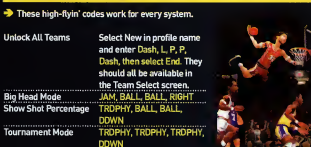
Costume	How you get it
Yukata [1]	Clear the game on Normal
Yukata [2]	Clear the game on Normal
Mini Yukata	Clear the game on Hard
Yae/Sae Version	Clear the game on Hard
Miku Version	Clear all the stages in mission mode with an S rank
Schoolgirl Version	Clear all the stages in mission mode with an S rank
Gothic Lolita	Clear all the stages in mission mode
Bondage Type	Clear all the stages in nightmare mode



08 NBA JAM PS2, HB, GC

➔ These high-flyin' codes work for every system.

Unlock All Teams	Select New in profile name and enter Dash, L, P, P, Dash, then select End. They should all be available in the Team Select screen.
Big Head Mode	JAM, BALL, BALL, RIGHT
Show Shot Percentage	TRDPHY, BALL, BALL, DOWN
Tournament Mode	TRDPHY, TRDPHY, TRDPHY, DOWN



09 TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A. PS2, HB, GC

➔ Enter these codes at the Pause menu. And stop saying "Izzie" already.

PS2	Left, Right, Left, Right, X
Unlock All Driving Upgrades	Up, Down, Up, Down, X
Unlock All Fighting Moves	Right, Left, Right, Left, X
Unlock All Gunplay Skills	

Xbox	Left, Right, Left, Right, A
Unlock All Driving Upgrades	Up, Down, Up, Down, A
Unlock All Fighting Moves	Right, Left, Right, Left, A
Unlock All Gunplay Skills	

GC	Left, Right, Left, Right, A
Unlock All Driving Upgrades	Up, Down, Up, Down, A
Unlock All Fighting Moves	Right, Left, Right, Left, A
Unlock All Gunplay Skills	



10 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND PS2, HB, GC

➔ One of the best racing series makes a triumphant return. Here are some quick cheats to get all the tracks. Enter the codes at the Main menu.



Xbox	Left, X, Right, R, X, L, White, Black
Unlock All Drag Tracks	Right, Right, Right, Right, Left, Black, R, White
Unlock All Drift Tracks	Up, Black, Black, Black, R, Down, Down, Down
Unlock All Sprint Tracks	Down, R, R, R, Black, Black, Black, X
Unlock All Circuit Tracks	

PS2	Right, Square, Left, R1, Square, L1, L2, R2
Unlock All Drag Tracks	Left, Left, Left, Left, Right, R2, R1, L2
Unlock All Drift Tracks	Up, R2, R2, R2, R1, Down, Down, Down
Unlock All Sprint Tracks	Down, R1, R1, R1, R2, R2, R2, Square
Unlock All Circuit Tracks	

GC	Right, Z, Left, R, Z, L, Y, X
Unlock All Drag Tracks	Left, Left, Left, Left, Right, X, R, Y
Unlock All Drift Tracks	Up, X, X, X, R, Down, Down, Down
Unlock All Sprint Tracks	Down, R, R, R, X, X, X, Z
Unlock All Circuit Tracks	

XB

PS2

PS2

GBA

GC

CONNECT

DOWNLOADS, DIARIES, AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE GAMING

PRO-PATCH PITCH

➔ I'm a proponent of patches for online console games. Yes, I know that opens the floodgates for developers to rush out busted products, knowing they can fix them at a later date, but hear me out.

Take *Rainbow Six 3*, an excellent Xbox Live shooter. Do you know you can shoot through walls in this game? And no, I won't be explaining how—because I don't know. For a game striving for realism, shooting through walls ranks right up there on the dumb list with glitches that magically make your head bulletproof, which is in there, too. How about a .50-caliber sniper rifle that pierces body armor to kill in one shot? Fine, that may be realistic and intentionally designed, but it sure as heck doesn't make for a balanced multiplayer experience.

Of course, the developers should've fixed or tweaked these things before the game's release, but be that as it may, upcoming patches can be a *Rainbow Six 3* fan's godsend. [The developers have stated they're looking into a "No .50 cal" filter/option for servers, but they haven't commented on the bigger technical issues.] I, for one, am happy knowing that fixes are at least a possibility. After all, game makers can't always beta test these titles to perfection, so our feedback can help get the games to how we want them to be. Make sure you send tech support your comments and complaints, and we'll see you online. ☛

"Dan 'Shoe' Niu
Editor-in-Chief, Electronic
Gaming Monthly

OMFG U STUPID NEWBIE

NEWS

➔ Back in its heyday, *Ultima Online* used to be quite a risky venture—you had to stay on your toes to keep from being jumped by unscrupulous player killers, and dying (whether to other players or to monsters) pretty much meant you could kiss your items good-bye. And it was fun that way, dammit. Without this element of risk, *UD* has become nothing

more than a bunch of bland, spawn-camping nonsense—kind of like every other MMORPG on the market.

Fortunately, a group of ambitious folks over at www.wifman.com/shard is making a valiant effort to bring this once-great game back to its roots. Their new *UD* server, called *In Por Yem* (named after one of the game's magic spells), eschews the ridiculous, *EverQuest*-ish direction that *UD* has taken over the past two years. Instead, it casts players back to the heyday of player conflict, guild wars, and adapt-or-perish gameplay—the way it should have stayed in the first place.

In Por Yem launched in November 2003, and it currently has a player base of roughly 1,500 users—quite a feat for a fan-maintained server. It's also got a diligent team of developers and support staff to fix bugs and answer players' questions, as well

as a very active community forum. And best of all, it's absolutely free to play. What more could a jaded *Ultima Online* fan ask for? ☛

—Ryan Scott



DOWNLOAD THIS! ➔

Every month we'll pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

KILLER 7 FLASH GAME

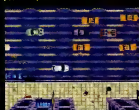
www.capcom.com/jp/killer7/



In the mood for some carnage? Check out this deliciously gory Flash preview of Capcom's upcoming GameCube title *Killer 7* and waste a few minutes with some *House of the Dead*-ish zombie-killing fun. ☛

ROCKSTAR CLASSICS

www.rockstargames.com/classics/



Everybody's favorite controversial gaming company has made a few of its classic PC games available as free downloads, starting with the original *Grand Theft Auto* and the vehicular combat game *Wild Metal*. ☛

WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN

www.blizzard.com/support/throne_v113_patch



The latest and greatest version of everybody's favorite online RTS game sports a number of new single-player campaign missions, a ton of balance changes, and lots of fixes and additions to the game's World Editor tool. ☛

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN



RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 21
SUBJOB LEVEL: B
NATION: WINDSOR
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN
PARCHES: ROUNDABOUTS

→ As plenty of Siren-bound FFXI-playing GMR readers discovered this month, that really is Milky running around.



→ There are two ways to get in on Milkman's Linshell group, the Roundabouts, and neither of them is to ask Milky himself. Instead, do a search for either of his two partners in crime—Lyonheart or Ondragon—and talk to one of them. If you're cool, you might get in on one of Siren's hippest Linshellies, and you might make some new friends as well.



I'm back, and, after (according to the game clock) nine actual days of playtime, I have the results to show for it. Playing FFXI this month has been a period of frustration and joy. The joy: Not only did I achieve what I set out to do last month, which was to acquire my subjob, but I also got my main job up to level 20 and secured my chocobo license, which made traveling about three times faster now that I don't have to run everywhere on foot. It is possibly the single most liberating thing in the game thus far.

The frustrations came in attempting to collect the parts I needed for my subjob. Since I decided to take the easier of the two quests required to qualify for a subjob, I needed to find a damselfly worm, a crab apron, and a magicked skull. The first two items were relatively simple to get, as the creatures that carry them are readily available. You just kill them until they randomly cough up what you need. The magicked skull, however, is only found on a monster known as a ghoul. It's not bad enough that ghouls are tough enemies, the real problem lies in the fact that they

only show up between the hours of 22:00 and 4:00 (by the in-game clock). This translates into about 10 real-world minutes of game time. And since ghouls only appear sporadically, you can almost see why it took me four human days to get a freakin' skull (I finally got mine on January 1, 2004).

Perhaps if I wasn't being so democratic, letting all my friends cast lots (FFXI's in-game lottery system for divvying up items), I might have gotten one sooner, but oh well. Be warned that playing this game requires extreme amounts of time and devotion in order to achieve your in-game goals. Time I got.

Other amusements this month were the New Year's monkey family that could be found walking all over Vana'diel, who, if offered the appropriate gifts, would give you a present in return. The presents were mostly lousy, though, so good riddance to those damn apes. Roaming treants were also found (and slaughtered), and I got eaten by a saber-toothed tiger. Pop in next month to see if I've gotten to level 30 (yeah, right!).

—James Mielke



RETROACTIVE

BROUGHT TO YOU THIS MONTH BY THE FINE FOLKS AT UMBRELLA CORP.

RESIDENT EVIL
BECAUSE GOOD ZOMBIES NEVER DIEBy the time the average child enters high school, he or she will have witnessed more than 4,000 acts of violent zombie death. Back in 1995, that number was seven. Could Capcom's seminal horror adventure series be to blame? GMR investigates... **Mark MacDonald**RESIDENT EVIL
"WAIT! DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR!"

PS1 | MAY 1996

➔ Sure, today you look at the original PlayStation *Resident Evil* and see muddy graphics, stiff controls, hilariously bad voice acting, and one of the cheesiest opening FMV sequences ever. But eight years ago, it was like nothing console gamers had ever seen (PC owners still champion the *Alone in the Dark* games). From straightforward "jump in your seat" surprises (like that first undead dog crashing through a window) to the guttural moans and pitter-pat of unseen zombie feet shuffling toward you, this

game had a single goal: scare the crap out of everyone. And back when the term "survival horror" sounded silly and me-too fighting and racing games filled the shelves, that was enough to make *Resident Evil* stand out. The cinematic presentation and technique of using polygonal characters on flat, rendered backgrounds also fit the game perfectly, and a new genre in gaming was born. **B+**



NOW... Still a classic, but dated. Play the REmake instead.

UNRAVING
5

THEN... You mean videogames can be scary? Who knew.

UNRAVING
9



NOW... Worth it for the story, but those damn clunky controls... grr!

UNRAVING
6

THEN... Balls-to-the-walls roller-coaster ride, plus other clichés.

UNRAVING
9

RESIDENT EVIL 2
"GUY'S A MANIAC... WHY'D HE BITE ME?!"

PS1, N64, DC, PC | JANUARY 1998

➔ After aborting an early version of a less-ambitious sequel, Capcom wisely started all over and eventually delivered *RE2*, a super-duper summer blockbuster of a follow-up, turned up to 11 and with all the bells and whistles.

Where the first game built up slowly, *RE2* explodes out of the box—from the first scene, players run through the fiery

downtown streets of a city in ruin, being chased by hordes of zombies. If *RE1* was about fear, *RE2* is about action. What the game lacks in subtlety, it makes up for with its deep and nuanced plot (still with cheesy dialogue, though) and "zapping" system: players can experience two sides of the story from the two different playable characters' perspectives. The rendered intro looks dated now, but at the time, it was some of the best CG work the gaming world had ever seen. **B+**

RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS
"STAAAAHISI!"

PS1 | NOVEMBER 1999

➔ Though it was never as popular as *RE2*, *Nemesis* features important innovations such as branching story paths, explodable barrels, a dodge maneuver, and a quick 180-degree turn. But the biggest change is this time, you're being hunted. The Nemesis, a gigantic mutant freak complete with black-leather trench coat and killer tentacle, suddenly appears and chases you from room to room, quite possibly causing you to pee your pants. *Nemesis* also includes

the best *RE* minigame to date, The Mercenaries, in which you control minor characters on a zombie-killing rampage against the clock to earn money for unlockable extras. The story centers on Jill Valentine from the original game, gives a few glimpses into the events proceeding *RE2*, and eventually ends the Raccoon City chapter of *RE* with a bang. **B+**



NOW... The sound of the Nemesis' voice still makes us wet 'em. **"STAAAAHISI!"**

UNRAVING
6

THEN... Not as novel as *RE1* or as epic as *RE2*, but still a great game in its own right.

UNRAVING
8

RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA

"THIS PLACE IS FINISHED!"

GC | MARCH 2000

➔ In most ways, Veronica was a return to the "more is more" philosophy of *Resident Evil* 2—more enemies, more playable characters, more weapons, more bosses. You even play as Claire Redfield from *RE2*, as well as her brother Chris from the first game.

Though originally made for Dreamcast (it was later expanded a bit for the X version on PS2 and GameCube), Veronica's crisp graphics hold up even by today's standards. (It's still the only main *RE* title to use real-time graphics

for the backgrounds, which allows the camera to move and follow the player.) Despite its huge and confusing maps and generally easy difficulty (save for one tough boss fight aboard a moving plane), Veronica has a special spot in most *RE* fans' hearts for its involved story line, complete with heavy Psycho overtones and more on series' bad boy Albert Wesker. **B+**



NOW... Play the X version for a bunch more crucial backstory.

UNRATED
8 ^(P)

THEN... Same great *RE2* beats, now with sharp-as-hell graphics.

UNRATED
9 ^(P)



NOW... Still one of the best Cuba games for the 10-and-up crowd.

UNRATED
9 ^(P)

THEN... A perfect blend of tried-and-true gameplay and cutting-edge graphics.

UNRATED
9 ^(P)

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO

"ZOMBIES AND MONSTERS?"

GC | NOVEMBER 2002

➔ Coming out so soon after the *RE* remake, the most recent *RE* game is also the most disappointing. Though it did introduce the cool new dynamic of switching between two playable characters on the fly (sometimes even controlling both at the same time), Zero too often falls back on the now-clashed conventions of the series. Giant mutated animal bosses? Check. Genius scientist gone mad? Check. Crate-pushing puzzle? Check. Final battle while the self-destruct timer runs

down? Check. At least the graphics are impressive, especially during the early part of the game, in which you're aboard a moving train with lights swaying and an animated background whizzing by. Unfortunately, the story line to this series prequel, starring Rebecca Chambers (a side character from the original *RE*), is uninspired and ultimately adds little to the overall mythos. **B-**



NOW... Even lazier in retrospect. Hopefully, *RE4* will redeem the series.

UNRATED
7 ^(P)

THEN... Pretty, but also pretty predictable. And a giant scorpion? C'mon.

UNRATED
8 ^(P)

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Phoenix, AZ
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THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTER

BUYER'S GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 MY GOD...THERE'S...HUNDREDS OF THEM!

PS2

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Jack/K Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking Dungeons & Dragons-based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again: BG&E is a spectacular adventure.	9
Bombastic	Capcom	Kudos to Capcom for bringing over the excellent Devil Dice series. Roll those dice, daddy needs a new pair of DualShocks.	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	4
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of Street Fighter and King of Fighters, and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	The Castlevania franchise goes 3D (again)! It's different from what we're used to, but it's still good.	8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like Devil May Cry, only not so antisocial.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic Contra gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	9
Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play DDR, you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, XXX was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know Devil May Cry was going to be Resident Evil 4 before it was spun off as its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	9
Dezasea: Hour of Darkness	Allus	Aside from being a fantastically deep strategy game, Dezasea is also the funniest strategy-RPG we've ever played.	8
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set to the tradition of ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
Escape From Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-looking, one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top Madden.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as NHL2K(x), where the (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	PS2 owners finally get to see what the whole EverQuest thing is about—and will never be seen again.	8
Fatal Frame 2	Tecmo	One of the downright creepiest ghost stories you'll ever experience. It also doubles as a fun game!	8
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first Final Fantasy does away with the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
Final Fantasy X-2	Square EA	Yuna and company put a fresh set of clothes on Final Fantasy X's gameplay. Hey, ladies!	9
Gran Turismo 3 A-spc	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes GT3 the best-playing/looking sim on the market.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both Grand Theft Auto III and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Gully Gear XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for Street Fighter 4? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's ESPN Quidditch would be like...	8
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	8
Hittman 2	Eidos	Most of the problems with the original Hittman have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?	9
Ico	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.	9
Jak II	Sony	Jak II tries to be everything to all gamers, and it ends up getting a lot of it right, but it's still derivative.	8
K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K-1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.	8
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	Can't carry a tune? Seriously, this game is still for you. Bring on the append discs!	8
KRLSwitch	Namco	Namco's action-shooter uses the concept of over to create battles with intensity. Not that battles usually aren't intense, mind you...	8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
Klonoa 2: Luncheon's Veil	Namco	Klonoa became a rare find in PlayStation's late days. The outstanding sequel looks to share the same fate. Grab it if you can.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best LOTR effort, an improvement on The Two Towers that looks fantastic.	8
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Anything bearing the valuable Lord of the Rings license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-em-up than just the name.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
The Mark of Kri	Sony	A slick action game with innovative controls. Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	8
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic Ghosts 'n' Goblins, complete with heart boxes and insane difficulty.	8
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	Improves upon the original Maximo in every conceivable way: better graphics, better camera, and a better pace.	8
MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much Improved over the original. Dreamcast incarnation, MDK 2: Armageddon is one of the better recent action games.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metel Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.	9
 MotoGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.	8

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	CNR. RATING
NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of <i>Thunder</i> , only better. Obviously for the NASCAR fans.	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of <i>Live</i> ? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent <i>NCAA 2003</i> , added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun or consequence free.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Blitz Pro	Midway	It's hardly realistic, but it's not supposed to be. It's also the closest we'll ever get to a new <i>Ice Hockey</i> or <i>Blades of Steel</i> .	8
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forward in defeating Nobun in <i>Onimusha</i> has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead to appear in the sequel.	8
Onimusha Warriors	Capcom	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	Sony	Going Commando borrows ingredients from other genres and makes a giant casserole of awesome.	9
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the <i>Rayman</i> franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves.	9
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than <i>Resident Evil 3</i> , Veronica's Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	8
Rez	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek-mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	9
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	ArCADE-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	8
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	8
The Simpsons Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good <i>Simpsons</i> game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will like to eat the references.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new meddler who figure out how to keep your Sim from pissing himself. Or, if you're like that, how to make him do it.	9
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of <i>The Sims</i> , but now with branching career paths that will take you forever to finish.	9
Sky Gunner	Atari	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and it can be a pretty big issue at times), <i>Sky Gunner</i> is great shooting fun.	8
Sly Cooper and the Thieves' Ransom	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department; it's a little on the short side, too.	8
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	9
SOCOM II	Sony	Everything you loved about the first <i>SOCOM</i> , now with less of everything you didn't like so much.	9
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VF4: Evolution</i> .	8
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	Ageton	Shake your groove thing, shake your groove thing, yeah yeah! Includes the original <i>Space Channel 5</i> and its sequel.	8
Splitter Cell	Ubisoft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	8
SpyHunter	Midway	A re-creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of classic remakes.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best <i>SSX</i> yet.	9
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future; <i>Sub Rebellion</i> is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	8
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially <i>Tekken 3</i> with enhanced graphics and tag teaming. Which isn't bad, considering <i>Tekken 3</i> is a great game to begin with.	8
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	Tenchu sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	8
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	EA	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	8
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Crave Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neverstodt dodges the 2-minute time limit in career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from <i>THPS3</i> .	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of <i>THUG's</i> customizable gameplay make it the best <i>Hawk</i> yet.	10
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 199 Studios, <i>Twisted Metal</i> makes a welcome return to its former gruesome glory.	9
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly \$20. Move the lawn twice, and it's yours.	10
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the Tony Hawk formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	8
War of the Monsters	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool \$20 mil. for this fun beat-'em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable <i>Concar</i> .	8
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	8
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oh-limited, never-surpassed style of racing remains intact.	8
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6	Konami	Feet down, the most natural-feeling soccer game ever. It lacks FIFA's presentation and licenses, but makes up for it in gameplay.	8
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	THQ	Much better than the previous <i>SmackDown!</i> , <i>HCTP</i> improves the previously flawed grappling system.	8
WWE SmackDown! Just Bring It	THQ	Even if this game scored a zero, it would still sell a truckload of copies. This is the marketing power of Vince McMahon and family.	8
Xenosaga	Namco	A massive RPG of epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the <i>Xeno</i> series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	9
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What they're trying to say is, <i>ZOE2</i> is better than the first.	8

[BUY!]

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

➔ You're telling to you this month, dear readers. A quick glance at some recent sales charts reveals that none of you are buying *BGE*. What, it may be so bold to ask, is the matter with you? It's already been marked down at many stores. Go buy it.



[AVOID!]

MANHUNT

➔ Rockstar's latest offering walks up to the boundary of good taste, looks both ways, cracks a small grin, and then defecates all over it. If you manage to see through the obvious shock appeal, then take care. You're one of life's better people.



➔ PC TOP 50 ONE MORE STAR WARS GAME. THEN

TYPE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Armored & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for III.	9
Butterfield 1942	Electronic Arts	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles [even planes!] while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	Revolution Games	If you like adventure games that offer challenging puzzles and great visuals, then cozy up to <i>The Sleeping Dragon</i> .	9
Civilization III	Infogrames	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Day of Defeat	Activision	You won't need to upgrade your videocard to play this teamplay-focused WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	9
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Invisible War, much like the first <i>Deus Ex</i> , is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
Diablo II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling diddler should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	9
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack-n-slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like GTA3, but with magic, elves, and all that D&D flava.	9
EverQuest	Sony Online	The MMORPG that's so addictive, it makes crack seem like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to <i>EverQuest</i> opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies [finally].	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game [set in the same universe as the classic <i>Fallout</i> RPG] that sets a new standard.	9
Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	If you possess the patience [and the money for the monthly fee], <i>FFXI</i> is a rewarding MMO experience.	9
Freedom Force	Electronic Arts	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements help make this witty comic-book-superhero-themed game one of the best.	10
FreeLancer	Microsoft	It's not as fantastic as some might expect a PC space shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern-combat simulation into an outstanding one.	9
Ghosts: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked-lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans; <i>GPA</i> and <i>F1 2002</i> are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is check this out of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MP3s.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killin'.	9
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubisoft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front.	9
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the <i>Star Wars</i> franchise since <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> . And the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Kohai: Ahiraman's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy game that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this über noir videogame feels like a movie, but plays like a great action game.	9
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> .	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
Motorcross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road superspeed fun with this free-wheeling dirt-bike simulator from the makers of <i>ATV Offroad Fury</i> .	9
NASCAR Racing 2004	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much fun in single player, but everything's been tweaked to near perfection.	9
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a D&D nerd then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This <i>Neverwinter Nights</i> expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	8
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cat Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof [if that's even possible], and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/light/tank sim went on to win CGW's 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character AI have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes <i>Rise of Nations</i> especially appealing.	8
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid defies the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	9
Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Electronic Arts	Sim Golf will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	9
The Sims	Electronic Arts	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superbubblecluster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	Electronic Arts	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool [sort of]. <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf games cool [sort of].	9
Trojan 2.0	Buena Vista	For our younger readers, we recommend renting the original <i>Trojan</i> , waiting 20 years, and then playing this game.	9
Unreal II: The Awakening	Infogrames	Somewhat of a letdown in terms of story and gameplay, but good nonetheless. Call us in five years when our garring rigs can handle it.	8
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to <i>Warcraft III</i> that isn't so moody and serious. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	8
Warlords: Battlecry II	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go well together—especially when combined with a big, gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY!]

CALL OF DUTY

➔ As a PC gamer, you probably already have 30 or so first-person shooters based on *World War II* sitting on your hard drive. If you've got the room, you might as well clear a spot for *Call of Duty*, a first-person shooter based on *World War II*.



[AVOID!]

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

➔ Set before the events of the excellent *No One Lives Forever* series, it seems oddly logical that *Contract J.A.C.K.* is missing NOLF's great humor, charm, and gameplay. And isn't this game supposed to be set in the '60s? Hi! the road, sir.



→ XBOX TOP 50 STILL PINING FOR HALO 2

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Data-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Bakusai: Gates: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking Dungeons & Dragons–based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again: BG&E is a spectacular adventure.	9
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Activision	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	9
Crimson Skies: High Noon to Revenge	Microsoft	The single-player mode might last you a day, but the online dogfighting lasts for an eternity. Or maybe just a few months.	8
Dead or Alive 3	Techno	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Techno	Pro tip: When playing DOAXBV, have your TV remote handy. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	8
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Sega	Invisible War, much like the first Deus Ex, is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top Madden.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as NHL 2K14, where the [u] is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both Grand Theft Auto III and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without Halo.	10
High Heat 2004	300	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Jet Set Radio Future has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust track system.	9
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best LOTR effort, an improvement on <i>The Two Towers</i> that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	Now this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Max Payne	Rockstar Games	The bullet-time effect is the big draw of this action/shooter: inspired by Hong Kong action flicks, set against a gritty New York City.	9
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
MotoGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of Live? As new announcer Mary Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	8
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
Ninja Gaiden	Techno	Itagaki's long-awaited and much-anticipated ode to the ninja is absolutely stunning.	9
Otogi: Myth of Demons	Sega	Otogi boasts some of the finest artistic touches you'll find on Xbox. Oh, the slice-and-dice, destroy-everything gameplay is fun, too.	8
Panzer Dragon 01a	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago [the original Panzer Dragon is included].	9
Phantom Crash	Phantagram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in cheap titles. The quirky, unique Phantom Crash has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	A great racer with the best implementation of online features to date. Plus, Geometry Wars!	9
RoadSport Challenge	Microsoft	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Activision	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is gray.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	9
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best SSX yet.	9
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	As usual, the Star Wars universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the Star Wars franchise since <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> , and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Steel Battalion	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you have to shell out \$300 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Steel Catfish II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as WFC Evolution.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	Edios	Everything good about the PS2 original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	Tactical shooting at its utmost best. Best played cooperatively over the Net with some friends. Or sworn enemies.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	Comparisons to <i>Metal Gear Solid</i> were inevitable. <i>Splinter Cell</i> holds its own, and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of THUG's customizable gameplay make it the best Hawk yet.	10
Top Spin	Microsoft	Microsoft liked <i>Virtua Tennis</i> so much, it went and made its own version...and it's better.	8
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmatching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sportlike Bombing Run.	8
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the Tony Hawk formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	WSB2K3 is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great Franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that still need to be worked out.	8

XB

[BUY!]

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

→ We'll tell you the same thing we told the PS2 guys and gals. Did you not read our review, the one that said, "If *Super Mario 64* is videogaming's 'A Hard Day's Night,' then *Beyond Good & Evil* is surely its 'Let It Be'?" Does that mean nothing to you?



[AVOID!]

SPAWN: ARMAGEDDON

→ The options of the Todd McFarlane design aesthetic tend to fall in two camps: love it or hate it. One thing that both sides ought to agree upon, however, is that no matter how it looks, playing *Spawn: Armageddon* is hell.



GAMECUBE TOP 50 THE RETURN OF THE PAC

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	CUR RATING
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So why is it so much fun to play?	8
Beach Spikers	Sega	Easy to pick up and easy to play, like Virtua Tennis. As with most arcade sports games, it's definitely better as a multiplayer affair.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again: B&E is a spectacular adventure.	9
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega	Sonic Team cracked a few eggs and whipped up a great platformer. Yeah, that was lame. Sorry.	8
Bomberman Generation	Mayesco	A surviving member of the old school, Bomberman has earned some tenure in the industry. This time, he sports a cat-shaded look.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in crash mode.	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (the first time), and the scenery is downright creepy.	9
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Unfortunately, F-Zero GX doesn't include vomit bags. Or the AX arcade machine. One of those would have been nice.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's ESPN Quidditch would be like...	8
High Heat 2004	JDO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best Zelda game ever, but selling back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best LOTR effort, an improvement on The Two Towers that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	The only thing missing is Mario hurling his 4-iron into the pond while screaming obscenities. Oh well, next time.	9
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	The Mario Kart legacy remains intact, offering up a highly enjoyable co-op mode and great track design.	10
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, Mario Party, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages (if you're legal, of course).	8
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected Super Metroid, added a friends, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
NASCAR Thunder 2003	Electronic Arts	It's apparently the fastest growing "sport" in America, and Thunder 2003 is packed under the hood, including an in-depth career mode.	9
NBA Courtside	Electronic Arts	No longer under the Nintendo development umbrella, Left Field's final installment of the Courtside series is a worthy bi-ball game.	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of Live? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new Ice Hockey or Blades of Steel.	8
Pac-Man Vs.	Namco	More than 20 years after the game's release, GMR reviews Pac-Man. It's sort of good, we guess.	8
Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battles (and the \$9 monthly fee).	8
Pikmin	Nintendo	Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But it is really Resident Evil without the laughably bad voice acting?	9
Resident Evil 0	Capcom	This one actually is a brand-new game, with significant changes such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	8
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega	An arcade-style soccer game with off-the-wall characters, arenas, and power-ups. And it's still better than Virtua Striker!	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of The Sims, but now with branching career paths, two-player co-op, and more.	8
Sims of Arcadia: Legends	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	8
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as V&V: Evolution.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA dishes individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best SSX yet.	8
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II	LucasArts	At times, Rogue Squadron II syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as Super Mario 64 was, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept; some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	8
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream. If only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendo characters. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of THUG's customizable gameplay make it the best Hawk yet.	10
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky Ultimate Muscle will be more to your liking.	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	A refreshingly original platformer/brawler with an outstanding art style and rock-solid mechanics.	8
Wario World	Nintendo	Ah! At this time, Wario has become quite effective at reclaiming his stolen treasure. Too effective, as Wario World is over quirky.	7
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8
WWE Wrestlemania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has had some run-ins with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8

[BUY!]

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Uh, we're not done with you just yet. We're probably the most upset with the GameCube owners. No more complaining about lack of third-party support, because support doesn't happen if people don't buy third-party games, ya dig?



[AVOID!]

THE HOBBIT

Of all the Lord of the Rings games to come out in the past couple of years, this one is among the worst. Cheap deaths abound, thanks to a poor camera and targeting system. Even Leonard Nimoy wouldn't find much to crouch about.



GBA TOP 50 SAME AS LAST MONTH. SOARY

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GBA RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to put yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	Wars 2 only adds a single new unit, but it's chock-full of new maps, terrain, and CO powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	6
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	Konami	It's gonna be a bright, bright, bright sun-shiny day. Well, it had damn well better be.	8
Car Battler Joe	Natsume	A fun and unique car-PG that lets you build cars, add parts and weapons, and travel the world in search of your father.	7
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than <i>Harmony of Dissonance</i> , but much too short. The soul system is a cool, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	<i>Castlevania</i> is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	7
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second <i>Castlevania</i> is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	9
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	If <i>Advance Wars</i> and <i>Final Fantasy Tactics</i> fell in love and had a baby, they'd call it <i>Fire Emblem</i> .	8
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new F-Zero based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Square Enix	At long last, we have a new <i>Final Fantasy Tactics</i> —and it's absolutely spectacular. Set aside 60 hours of free time...	9
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come majors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	8
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The GT <i>Advance</i> series has always been technically marvelous, and GT3 (yeah, we know) finally has a battery-save function!	6
Gully Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic <i>Kirby's Adventure</i> with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	7
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this <i>Klonoa</i> is a more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	8
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends and you've got a bona fide <i>Zelda</i> party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hylia!	8
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the <i>Lufia</i> series is just as engaging as <i>Final Fantasy</i> . It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubisoft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great <i>Lunar</i> gameplay and story remain intact.	7
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	It's the only place you'll find the Tanooka, and that's reason enough to buy this stellar (and hilarious) RPG.	9
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of <i>Super Mario Kart</i> and <i>Mario Kart 64</i> that even includes all the tracks from the former.	7
Mega Man and Bass	Capcom	It's hard, so very hard. But what <i>Mega Man</i> game isn't? Play as either <i>Mega Man</i> or wily robot <i>Bass</i> —each one has different abilities.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than an platformer, the <i>Battle Network</i> series is a nice change of pace for <i>Mega Man</i> and pals.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	<i>Battle Network 3</i> is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the <i>X</i> -side story played as Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beamsaber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to <i>Super Metroid</i> is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Ninja Five-O	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of <i>Bionic Commando</i> , complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes <i>Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3</i> .	9
Pokemon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from 2-on-2 battles, the first GBA <i>Pokemon</i> combo doesn't really change the original formula.	9
Rayman Adventure	Ubisoft	<i>Rayman</i> is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	8
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	<i>Sonic Advance 2</i> is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's <i>Sonic Adventure</i> games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinball features tables from the classics <i>Nights</i> and <i>Samba de Amigo</i> .	6
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents SF3A from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	8
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through <i>Ghouls & Ghosts</i> ? Get ready to do it all over again.	8
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of <i>Super Mario Bros. 2</i> .	8
Super Mario Advance 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable <i>Super Mario World</i> " and "you should buy it."	9
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	9
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included <i>Monkey Bowling</i> and <i>Monkey Fight</i> !	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with Tetris. <i>Puzzle Fighter II</i> is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Activision	The combo of SF3A, <i>Gully Gear X Advance</i> , and <i>Super Street Fighter II</i> is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy-RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how <i>Activision</i> managed to cram <i>Tony Hawk</i> into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtua Tennis	Atlus	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging world tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The <i>Wario</i> series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
WarioWare, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames from <i>WarioWare's</i> madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

GBA

[BUY]

ADVANCE WARS 2

➔ This isn't so much a recommendation for *Advance Wars 2* as it is a chance for us to make another printed plea to Nintendo for a networked GameCube version. OK, fine, you should go buy *Advance Wars 2*.



[AVOID]

SWORD OF MANA

➔ This could have been a great game had it not been for the lousy interface and battle system that forces you to switch weapons in the middle of a fight. Oh, and the A.I.-controlled partner is more of a baby-sitting assignment than a comrade. Tragic.





GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD!
HE'S PISSED!

SAVE HIM THE TROUBLE

➔ "Hey there, Mr. Geezer, Happy New Year!"

Bah! The only thing happy about it is that I'm another step closer to dyin' and getting away from all you fools once and for all, thank God! Now why don't y'all pile back into your little clown car and get outta my way.

"But where are you going, Mr. Geezer? And, hey, why are you carrying that broken keyboard?"

Why? I'll tell ya why! Because it's going in the junk pile with all the other keyboards I broke since I started playing *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* on my PC. That's why!

"But, Mr. Geezer—we don't get it, why is that game making you break your keyboard over and over? Don't you like it?"

Course I like it, morons! Ya think I'd keep playing it if I hated it? I'm not that much of a masochist. And if I really wanted to punish myself, I could just go into the bedroom there and ask Mrs. Geezer to take her clothes off. That woman is so ugly that she'll burn your retinas right off, I'm tellin' ya! I ought to get some kind of

Congressional Medal of Valor or something just for livin' in the same bed with that gorilla!

"Err, you were talking about *Prince of Persia*?"

Yeah, yeah, I know! I still have a couple o' marbles left in the old noggin up here! The point is, *Prince of Persia* is a damn near perfect game, one of the best of 2003, but whoever made the decision to design the save points the way they did has a date in their future with the back side of my fist!

Let me tell all you moron game developers reading this a thing or two. Put down your Red Bull and Cheetos and pay attention. First of all, we don't need no stinkin' save points anymore—period. It's 2004 now, not 1987. We want to play your games, but we don't want to have to spend 200 hours repealing the same damn levels over and over just to prove we're worthy of playing your game. You want to make your game hard? Fine—then put in some difficulty levels! Let those kids who feel the need to prove their manhood by never saving beat your game in some kinda no-save model!

What do I care? But all the rest of us—those with actual lives, and those who stink at most games—let us enjoy the freakin' thing too, OK? It's our money you took.

In *Prince of Persia*, the save points are generously scattered throughout the game, but the designers—apparently having ingested an extra dose of stupid pills while working—decided to make many of 'em available in certain, tough levels only after you beat round after round of unbelievably annoying, respawning monsters. Yeah, that's what I want to do after navigating

my way through a tough level: earn my right to save all over again. Thanks. Here's a thought: How about giving me a save point—and some freaking health while you're at it—before I have to do your stinkin' combat?

Is that asking too much? Could you work a little harder on cutting the sadism out of the game design? Then maybe I'd stop hating games that I'm otherwise trying to love, and I'd stop pounding my fists and head against this growing collection of broken keyboards here.

Bah! ☹



I'D STOP HATING GAMES THAT I'M OTHERWISE TAYING TO LOVE.



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MATURE 17+



Blood and Gore
Intense Violence



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